

MARKO ATTILA HOARE

# THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*A HISTORY*



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For Max and Ceci

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## GLOSSARY

Arnaut	Albanian
Bajram	‘Eid’: a Muslim holiday
<i>ban</i>	Medieval Bosnian viceroy
<i>banovina</i>	Province of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
<i>beg</i>	Bosnian Muslim landlord
Bosanska Krajina	Western Bosnia (literally ‘Bosnian Borderland’)
<i>čaršija</i>	Commercial centre of a Bosnian town; by extension urban elite
Chetnik	‘Trooper’: a Serb-nationalist rebel, in particular a member of Draža Mihailović’s ‘Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland’
<i>chiflik</i>	<i>De facto</i> hereditary Ottoman landholding
Doglavnik	Deputy leader or Vice-Führer of the NDH (q.v.)
Domdo	‘Home Guard Volunteer’: pertaining to the autonomist Muslim militia established by Major Muhamedaga Hadžiefendić in north-east Bosnia
El-Hidaje	Organisation representing the Muslim clergy under the NDH
<i>firman</i>	Ottoman decree
Frankist	Follower of Josip Frank (1844–1911), founder of the ‘Croatian Pure Party of Right’, from which the Ustasha movement eventually emerged
Gajret	Serb-oriented Muslim cultural society, disbanded by the Ustashes in 1941
Great Župa	Administrative division of the NDH (q.v.)
Great Župan	Administrative head of a Great Župa (q.v.)
Herceg-Bosna	Diminutive of ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina’; not to be confused with the ‘Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna’, established by Bosnian Croat nationalists in 1992
<i>hadji</i>	Observant Muslim who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>hafiz</i>	Observant Muslim who has completely memorised the Koran
<i>hajduk</i>	Christian anti-Ottoman rebel or outlaw

## GLOSSARY

<i>hodja</i>	Muslim clergyman
<i>imam</i>	Prayer leader of a mosque
<i>kasaba</i>	Provincial town
<i>kadi</i>	Muslim judge
<i>kum</i>	Ceremonial kinsman, equivalent to a godparent or to a groom's best man
<i>kuna</i>	Unit of currency of the NDH (q.v.)
Kurban-bajram	Eid al-Adha: a Muslim holiday
<i>logornik</i>	Ustasha commander
<i>madrasah</i>	Islamic theological seminary
<i>mekteb</i>	Islamic primary school
<i>mufti</i>	Officially appointed interpreter of Sharia law
Napredak	Bosnian Croat cultural society
Narodna Uzdanica	Croat-oriented Muslim cultural society
<i>oblast</i>	Territorial administrative unit, larger than an <i>okrug</i> (q. v.) but smaller than a province
<i>okrug</i>	Territorial administrative unit, larger than a district but smaller than an <i>oblast</i> (q. v.)
Partisan	Member of the Communist-led Yugoslav guerrilla army
<i>pashalik</i>	Ottoman province
Poglavnik	Leader of the NDH (q.v.), equivalent to 'Duce' or 'Führer'
Prosvjeta	Bosnian Serb cultural society
Reis ul-Ulema	The most senior Muslim cleric in Yugoslavia and in the NDH (q.v.)
<i>šokac</i>	Derogatory term for a Croat
Sporazum	Agreement: in particular, that of 26 August 1939 between the Yugoslav government and the Croat opposition, involving the effective partition of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia
<i>tabornik</i>	Ustasha commander
<i>ulema</i>	Scholars/judges of Muslim law, tradition and theology
Ulema Medžlis	High Islamic Council
<i>uskok</i>	Croatian anti-Ottoman seaborne guerrilla or pirate
Ustasha	'Insurgent': A Croat fascist
<i>vakıf</i>	Islamic foundation
<i>vlach</i>	Derogatory term for a Serb
<i>vojvoda</i>	'Warlord': a Chetnik leader
Young Muslims	Radical Muslim autonomist youth group
<i>župa</i>	Administrative district

## ACRONYMS

ABiH	Archive of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo
AJ	Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade
AVII	Archive of the Military-Historical Institute, Belgrade
AVNOJ	Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia
FNRJ	Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia
HDA	Croatian State Archive, Zagreb
HMBiH	Historical Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo
HRSS	Croat Republican Peasant Party, pro-Partisan wing of the HSS (q.v.) after World War II
HSS	Croat Peasant Party, principal Croat political party of the inter-war period
IHRPH	Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement of Croatia
JMO	Yugoslav Muslim Organisation, the principal Muslim party of the inter-war period
KPH	Communist Party of Croatia
KPJ	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NDH	Independent State of Croatia, Axis puppet-state established in occupied Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1941
NOB	People's Liberation Struggle
NOO	People's Liberation Council, organ of government in a Partisan-held territory
NOP	People's Liberation Movement, the resistance movement led by the KPJ (q.v.)
NOR	People's Liberation War
NOU	People's Liberation Shock [Brigade]
NR BiH	People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina
SKOJ	League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, the KPJ's (q.v.) youth organisation
UNS	Ustasha Surveillance Service, the secret police of the NDH (q.v.)
ZAVNOBiH	Country Anti-Fascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnian Partisan legislature established in November 1943

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## FOREWORD

This is the third and final book to emerge from my long period of research into the history of national identity in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the birth of the modern Bosnian state. It began with a research paper written in autumn 1995 when I was a PhD student at Yale University and published 'The People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-45: What Did It Mean to Fight for a Multi-National State?'.<sup>1</sup> This then grew into a PhD research project, originally with the title 'The Establishment of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1941-1948', on which I began working full-time at the start of 1997. At the time, I had no idea what a huge project I was taking on, or what a large part of my life it would consume. It proved to be too big for a single doctoral dissertation, so my PhD thesis ended up focusing on the prequel to my original story and was presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University under the title: 'The Chetnik-Partisan Conflict and the Origins of Bosnian Statehood'. This thesis formed the basis of my book *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943*,<sup>2</sup> which I wrote while a British Academy postdoctoral research fellow at the Faculty of History of the University of Cambridge. Meanwhile, the extensive background research I carried out on the history of the national question in Bosnia-Herzegovina gave birth to another book, *The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*.<sup>3</sup> The current volume was finally completed while I was a Reader at Kingston University, London. Ironically, it is only with the publication of this third volume that my work has come full circle. I have finally accomplished the task I set out to do when I began my doctoral research in 1997.

Thanks are due firstly to my doctoral dissertation mentor, Ivo Banac, whose support and occasional strictness guided me through the many pitfalls of the long processes of research and writing. Thanks are due to Noel Malcolm for the innumerable acts of support and advice he has given me over the last ten years; acts that greatly contributed to making this book possible.

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## FOREWORD

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I am grateful to the members of the Union of the Associated Fighters of the People's Liberation Antifascist War of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Society for the Truth of the Antifascist People's Liberation Struggle and other Partisan veterans who took the time to talk to me about their wartime experiences and whose names are listed in the bibliography. In particular I wish to thank the late Salih Osmanbegović and the late Džemil Šarac, who I am sorry will never be able to read this book; and Sead Hadžović, a kindred spirit in politically difficult times.

Very special thanks are due to the friends who helped me in a personal capacity while I was writing this book, both materially and emotionally: Ehlimana Salihbegović; the late Mela Telalbašić; Bogić and Nada Bogičević; Ivo Rusan, Jagoda Splivalo and Iva Rusan. Finally, very special thanks are due to my grandmothers Rosemary Hoare and the late Nevenka Magaš; and to my parents, Branka Magaš and Quintin Hoare, for their emotional and material support during the long years of study that led to this book.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE MUSLIM ROAD TO THE COMMUNIST TRIUMPH IN YUGOSLAVIA

There have been only two successful, indigenous Communist-led revolutions in Europe's history. The first was the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the second was the revolution in the western Balkans, specifically Yugoslavia and Albania, which took place during World War II. Whereas the first of these revolutions has generated an enormous amount of scholarly research in the English language, the second has been largely neglected by historians outside Yugoslavia and Albania, even though, as with the Russian Revolution, it involved a complete overturning of the political and socio-economic orders in the countries involved. This book is intended as a contribution to making good this deficit. It is a study of the Yugoslav Revolution of 1941–45 in its epicentre, the land of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was the central battlefield of the Yugoslav civil war that spawned the revolution, the home of Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav Communist leadership for the best part of the war and the lynchpin of the new Yugoslav order that arose from the revolution.

Many non-Yugoslav historians have touched upon the Yugoslav Revolution in the course of more general histories of Yugoslavia or the Balkans.<sup>1</sup> Some have summarised it.<sup>2</sup> Others have written about it through the prism of Allied policy,<sup>3</sup> or in the context of the life of Tito.<sup>4</sup> A few have produced monographs devoted to particular aspects of it or to closely related topics.<sup>5</sup> Yet none has produced a comprehensive monograph explaining and describing the revolution as a whole. Non-Yugoslav historians have, by and large, rested content with the myth propounded both by its champions and by its opponents since it happened: the myth of a pristine Communist revolution carried out by a homogeneous, all-Yugoslav Communist party, under the stewardship—whether brilliant or diabolical—of Tito, in the wider context of a national liberation struggle against Nazi Germany and other fascist states that occupied Yugoslavia in 1941. The appeal of this myth, even for those who lament Tito's triumph and the role Britain and the US played in it, has served as a major barrier to the sort of intellectual inquiry that has been so fruitful in producing high-quality historical research on the Bolshevik Revolution. Some historians, sympathetic to Tito and his Communists, fell in love with the heroism of the story as traditionally told; of the Partisan guerrillas who took

on and defeated the Axis occupiers, liberating their country and producing a new Yugoslavia independent enough to defy Stalin and the Soviet Union and build an 'independent road to socialism'. Other, anti-Communist historians remained angry for decades at what they saw as the ruthlessness of the evil genius Tito, who hoodwinked Churchill into backing his grab for power, enabling his small clique of dedicated revolutionaries to impose their unrepresentative dictatorship on Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> Yet whether they were Titoist or anti-Titoist in their sympathies, historians remained blinded above all by the myth of 'Yugoslavia', of a single, seamless country that Tito and his Partisans either rescued and redeemed or conquered and raped. Consequently, the interpretive model of Tito's rise to power has scarcely advanced from that of the first, highly impressionistic and subjective accounts by eyewitnesses and contemporaries.<sup>7</sup>

The events of the 1990s have, however, shown us that this version of events is inadequate: Yugoslavia, as a country and as a state, was little more than a house of cards that barely outlived the fall of the Titoist Communist one-party rule that held it together. Tito's Yugoslavia was not a genuine country or nation-state; it was a fragile and elaborate compromise that allowed different countries or nation-states to cohabit for less than half a century. The real and enduring national and patriotic loyalties of the Yugoslavs were not to Yugoslavia, but to its constituent lands and peoples: to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia; and to the Slovene, Croat, Bosniak, Serb, Montenegrin, Albanian, Macedonian and other nationalities. While Yugoslavia vanished, its constituent lands and peoples remained. The nature of Titoist Yugoslavia's demise in the 1990s necessarily raised questions about how it had been created, under the leadership of Tito and the Communists, in the 1940s. For all that historians sympathetic to Tito and the Partisans might romanticise them as embodying the Yugoslav 'essence', the real puzzle, in light of the events of the 1990s, is to explain how they managed to recreate Yugoslavia, after it so ignominiously collapsed in 1941. Then, as fifty years later in 1991, Yugoslavia dissolved with extraordinary bloodshed and destruction, involving multiple genocides. The Partisans managed to recreate Yugoslavia, not just at the state level, but even reintegrating multinational communities at the local and regional levels.

This achievement can no longer be explained through reference to a united Yugoslavia as the 'natural' order of things, nor to any great loyalty or identification with the land and state of Yugoslavia on the part of its inhabitants. Unlike the first, monarchical Yugoslav state that had existed on the basis of a unitary constitutional order between 1921 and 1939, the new Yugoslavia established by Tito and the Partisans in the 1940s was not a unitary state. Formally proclaimed at the Second Session of the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije, AVNOJ) on 29–30 November 1943, its constitution being promulgated in January 1946, it was necessarily a federation. It comprised six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia; the last of these included also the autonomous province of Vojvodina and autonomous region of Kosovo-Metohija. Given that in the 1990s Yugoslavia vanished while the federal units survived, and that now all six republics as well as Kosovo have been recognised as independent states, the establishment of these federal and autonomous units appears retrospec-

## INTRODUCTION

tively as a more enduring achievement on the part of Tito and the Partisans than the establishment of a new Yugoslavia, which proved to be transient. Yet the existing historiography dealing with Tito and the Partisans, particularly in the English language, focuses almost entirely on their all-Yugoslav character and generally says very little about the nature of the revolution in the individual Yugoslav lands or about how and why the individual republics and autonomous units came to be formed, or why the new Yugoslav federation was organised as it was.

The traditional historical narrative favoured by historians sympathetic to Tito and the Partisans has tended to portray their military successes and ultimate conquest of power in Yugoslavia as a whole as the product of excellent military organisation, strict discipline and firm leadership—symbolised by the ‘Proletarian Brigades’ that began to be formed at the end of 1941, and by the ability of the Partisan forces directly commanded by Tito’s Supreme Staff to ward off destruction, in the face of overwhelming odds, at the legendary battles of the Neretva and the Sutjeska in the first half of 1943. Not only historians but members of the general public, even children, with an interest in World War II are likely to have an image in their mind of heroic Yugoslav Partisan guerrillas ambushing and destroying German military convoys in mountain passes. Yet while military prowess should by no means be discounted as an explanation for the Partisan victory, it is far from a sufficient explanation. The lesson of warfare in the former Yugoslavia bequeathed to us by the wars of the 1990s is that it is extremely difficult for even a superior military force to conquer cities and towns in the face of determined resistance by even poorly armed defenders. Hence the inability of the heavily armed Bosnian Serb forces to capture Sarajevo or other key cities, such as Tuzla or Bihać. The relatively small town of Vukovar in eastern Croatia withstood a long siege in 1991 by the heavily armed Yugoslav People’s Army, despite the latter’s overwhelming superiority in armaments; Vukovar had to be completely destroyed to be conquered. The capture of towns by all sides in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991–95 invariably involved the exodus of their populations, whether as a result of ethnic cleansing by the capturers, planned evacuation by the defenders, or fleeing by the population to avoid reprisals. At the time of writing, in 2011, the agonisingly slow conquest of the city of Sirte in Libya by forces of the National Transitional Council, in the face of bitter resistance from those of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, had just been completed—but not before reconfirming this lesson.

The Partisans, by contrast, succeeded in conquering Yugoslavia without either destroying its cities and towns or driving out its civilian population (except in the cases of Yugoslavia’s ethnic German population and part of its ethnic Italian population, which were expelled through deliberate policies). This achievement, indeed the Partisan victory itself, may blithely be attributed to the fact that the Partisans, under Communist guidance, were drawn from all Yugoslavia’s peoples and preached ‘brotherhood and unity’, a new Yugoslavia based on equal rights for all, thereby earning at least a degree of acceptance and trust on the part of all Yugoslavia’s principal nationalities. Yet the reality is that the Partisans were entirely ready to engage in large-scale reprisals against civilians, as the end-of-war massacres of tens of thousands of quisling and collaborationist troops and civilians at Bleiburg and elsewhere demonstrated. Neither popular trust in the Partisans nor

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an absence of mass civilian exodus or retaliatory massacres flowed naturally from the Partisans' multinational Yugoslav ideology. Be that as it may, the Partisans of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, were a predominantly Serb force (overwhelmingly Serb in the early months of the uprising, dropping to approximately two-thirds Serb by the autumn of 1943) but were nevertheless able to capture Bosnia's towns and cities from predominantly Croat and Muslim quiescent forces, without either engaging in Vukovar-style urban destruction or provoking an exodus of the civilian population.

This is a reflection of the grass-roots, 'from below' character of the resistance movement led by the Communists—known formally as the People's Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret*, NOP)—whose military wing is more properly described by the term 'Partisans'. The traditional historiographical stress on the heroics of Tito and his main force of Partisans, fighting in the hills, mountains and valleys, obscures the activities of the NOP at the grass-roots level in the towns and cities, which enabled the Partisans to capture Bosnia and other areas through these towns and cities, rather than in opposition to them. Historians of the Bolshevik Revolution have long since demolished the myth that that revolution was simply a coup by a clique of dedicated revolutionaries; their research has revealed instead a popular revolution with considerable regional variation, in which local soviets and workers' councils were sometimes ahead of the Bolshevik leaders themselves in pushing for the overthrow of Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government.<sup>8</sup> Yet historians of the former Yugoslavia are still stuck with an out-of-date, top-down model of the Yugoslav Revolution, which focuses exclusively on the top Communist leadership and mostly ignores events at the grass-roots level.

This book is not intended as a comprehensive response to these deficiencies in the existing historiography—nor can any such response ever be comprehensive—but as a major contribution to remedying them. Above all, it aims to fill in the most puzzling of blanks regarding the historiographical picture of the Yugoslav Revolution: the blank surrounding its epicentre, Bosnia-Herzegovina. A large part of the world's population only became aware of this country's existence with the outbreak of war there in 1992. Yet this same country had been the core land of Tito's legendary People's Liberation Movement. Following its expulsion from Serbia at the end of 1941, the Partisan leadership, in the form of the Supreme Staff of the People's Liberation Army and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, KPJ) under Josip Broz Tito, made Bosnia its base for the following two and a half years, barring its short excursion into Montenegro in the spring of 1943. The most legendary events in the history of the Partisan movement occurred in this period, which formed the basis of the mythology of the Yugoslav Communist regime after the war: the founding of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian Brigades; the 'Long March' across Bosnia; the convening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of AVNOJ at Bihać; the battles of the Neretva and the Sutjeska; the convening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of AVNOJ at Jajce and the founding of the new Yugoslav state; and the German attack on Tito's headquarters at Drvar.

True, it was Serbia, as the dominant land of pre-war Yugoslavia and home of the Yugoslav capital Belgrade, that was ultimately most important in determining the victory or defeat of the Yugoslav Partisans' revolution. Yet the Partisan seizure of Serbia, which took place in the autumn of 1944, necessitated the prior establish-

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ment of a firm Partisan bastion in Bosnia as a necessary springboard for a push eastward. Bosnia, as well as other Yugoslav lands outside Serbia, was needed also to provide a sufficient number of Serb-majority Partisan units to conquer the latter land, where the Partisan movement had been weak since late 1941 and the anti-Communist forces predominated. Although Bosnia contributed substantially fewer Partisans to the movement as a whole than neighbouring Croatia, its contribution was nevertheless greater than that of any other Yugoslav land for the best part of the war: of 97 Partisan brigades in existence by the end of 1943—shortly after the foundation of the new Yugoslavia—38 were from Croatia, 23 from Bosnia-Herzegovina and 18 from Slovenia. At this time, the whole of eastern Yugoslavia (Vojvodina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia) was contributing only 18 Partisan brigades.<sup>9</sup> It was Croatia and Bosnia—territories, for the most part, of the so-called ‘Independent State of Croatia’ (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH)—that together comprised the Partisan powerhouse, and of these two territories, Bosnia’s location adjacent to Serbia made it the natural choice for the seat of Tito’s command and the centre of his movement. After Belgrade was liberated in October 1944, the central organs of the embryonic Yugoslav federal state were moved there, but they had been forged in Bosnia. Jajce, where the new Yugoslav state was formally founded, had been the Bosnian medieval capital.

Revolutions are, to a very large extent, shaped by events at their epicentre. As Paris shaped the character of the French Revolution, as Petrograd shaped the character of the Russian Revolution, so it is reasonable to assume that Bosnia-Herzegovina must have shaped the character of the Yugoslav Revolution. True, Bosnia is a country, not a city, but its population of just over 2.4 million in 1941 was scarcely larger than Petrograd’s in 1917. Unlike the French and Russian revolutionaries, Tito and his Supreme Staff and Central Committee had, of necessity, a peripatetic seat or capital, moving between different Bosnian towns from the end of 1941 until the middle of 1944; from Foča to Drvar via Bihać and Jajce. Bosnia is therefore key to understanding the Yugoslav Revolution.

Yet for the NOP to establish a sufficiently firm base in Bosnia, it had to contend with the fact that Bosnia’s population was nationally heterogeneous. Of a Bosnian population of 2,323,555 in 1931, 44.25 per cent (1,028,139) were Orthodox, mostly Serb; 30.9 per cent (718,079) were Muslim; 23.58 per cent (547,949) were Catholic, mostly Croat; and 1.27 per cent (29,388) were of other religious denominations, above all Jewish.<sup>10</sup> The Serbs were initially the Bosnian nationality that could most readily be mobilised in the Partisans, on account of the genocidal persecution to which they were subjected by the Ustasas, the Croat fascists who headed the NDH under the leadership of the ‘Poglavnik’, Ante Pavelić. Consequently, in the early stages of the Bosnian Partisan uprising, the Bosnian Partisans were essentially a Serb army at the level of the rank and file. Yet a Bosnian resistance movement could only be successful if it were to encompass at least part of the non-Serb majority in Bosnia as well—above all, the Muslims. This was particularly so since in the Bosnian towns the Muslims were easily the most significant element, comprising 50.43 per cent of the urban Bosnian population in 1931 against 23.23 per cent for the Catholics and 22.34 per cent for the Orthodox.<sup>11</sup> To hold power in a country requires holding the main towns and Bosnia’s towns could not be held without a political base among the urban Mus-



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lim population; just as Bosnia was the key to power in Yugoslavia, so the Muslims were the key to power in Bosnia. But the Bosnian Muslim nation in 1941 was not polarised along class lines, and the mass of the Muslim population, predominantly peasants, looked to the Muslim elite for political leadership. This required the NOP to co-opt members of the Muslim elite if it were to gain a solid foothold among the Muslim masses.

The story of how the Yugoslav Partisans won the support of part of the Bosnian Muslim population, and part of the Muslim elite, is therefore a crucial aspect of the story of how the Yugoslav Revolution triumphed. Yet it is a story that has been ignored in the familiar English-language accounts of the Revolution, which are more likely to write off the key Bosnian Muslim element in Orientalist terms. Milovan Đilas, referring to the Muslim population of Komaran in the Sanjak, claims that they had 'out of traditional religious intolerance, joined every invader of the Serbian lands'.<sup>12</sup> Fitzroy Maclean, in reference to the Ustasha genocide of the Serbs, describes the Bosnian Muslims as 'fanatical' and as having 'delighted at the opportunity of massacring Christians of whatever denomination'.<sup>13</sup> Such crude stereotypes substitute for a genuine understanding of what went on in Yugoslavia during World War II. Emily Greble's meticulous 2011 study of Sarajevo under Ustasha rule is a major contribution to correcting the stereotypes about and rectifying the deficit in our understanding of Bosnia and its Muslims in World War II and brings previously unseen depth and nuance to the topic.<sup>14</sup> Yet the NOP and the revolution feature only slightly in this work.

Although the historiography in English and other non-Yugoslav languages concerning the Yugoslav Revolution is massively deficient, the same cannot be said for the historiography that arose in the former Yugoslavia itself, particularly among those writing in the language (or, some would say, languages) formerly called 'Serbo-Croat' and now frequently referred to as 'BCS' ('Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian'). Indeed, several excellent monographs and very many solid but pedestrian monographs have been written about the Partisans in Bosnia, and more generally in Yugoslavia, both during and after the Communist era.<sup>15</sup> The problem here, however, is that they were generally written from within the Titoist paradigm, stressing the centrality of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as the creative force in the People's Liberation Struggle. In this sense, new ground was broken by the 1998 study of Bosnia in World War II, subsequently translated into English as 'Bosnia and Hercegovina in the Second World War', written by the *doyen* of Titoist Bosnian historians of the revolution, himself a Partisan veteran, Professor Enver Redžić.<sup>16</sup> Breaking with the bipolar Titoist model whereby World War II in Bosnia (and in Yugoslavia as a whole) was a struggle of the Communist-led Partisans on one side and everyone else on the other, Redžić presented a less Communist-centric picture in which the Partisans in Bosnia were merely one party in a five-sided struggle, the others being the Axis occupiers, the Ustashes, the Chetniks and the Muslim autonomists. Redžić's model more accurately represented the complexities of the struggle than the orthodox Titoist one. Yet Redžić's chapter on the side that won, the People's Liberation Movement, remained within the orthodox Titoist paradigm, since he still portrayed this movement essentially as top-down, homogeneous and pristine. Redžić placed the People's Liberation Movement in its proper context, instead of the elevated place

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it had been given by orthodox Titoist historians. However, he did not attempt to deconstruct the NOP itself, leaving the reasons for the NOP's triumph as opaque as they were in earlier works.

Furthermore, in continuing to present the conflict as one between rigidly distinct sides, Redžić's model remained defective. The three principal domestic factions that competed with one another for the hearts and minds of the Bosnian Muslim population—the Ustasas, Muslim autonomists and People's Liberation Movement—were not rigidly distinct. The mass of ordinary Muslims and other Bosnians were not strongly committed to any of the sides, but sought only to survive the war; their loyalties shifted and fluctuated in line with the behaviour of the different sides toward the civilian population, the effectiveness of the sides' respective propaganda, the military fortunes of the sides' respective international patrons (Axis and Allies), the behaviour and policy of these patrons and simple personal interest and opportunity. Many individuals kept feet in more than one camp and single families could include supporters of all three. Many NDH officials and quisling soldiers collaborated with the NOP. Broad networks of personal connections cut across the divides between the opposing camps. A large part of the NOP's activity and a reason for its ultimate success—obscured in the traditional historiography, with its stress on military actions—consisted in winning over sections of the civilian population, NDH officialdom and quisling soldiery, both NDH and Muslim-autonomist, through the use of propaganda and agitation. Revolutions succeed when pillars of the old order crumble and defectors struggle for a new order. The traditional historiography presents the Yugoslav Revolution essentially as a military conquest of power by one side in a civil war, but it was more than this; it was a genuine revolution of grass-roots activism, infiltration and defection. As in Petrograd in November 1917, it was the large-scale defection of the soldiers and garrisons of the old order that made the revolution much less bloody than it would otherwise have been.<sup>17</sup>

The present work is, first, a study of the relationship between the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the People's Liberation Movement. It seeks to explain how and why large sections of the Bosnian Muslim population came to support the NOP, and to trace the resulting dynamic. Of course, the story of the Bosnian Muslims in the NOP cannot be told in isolation from that of other Bosnians, and this book more generally seeks to describe and explain the revolution as it embraced Bosnia and all its peoples. It examines how the NOP emerged victorious in the war in Bosnia, seized power across the country and established a new People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a constituent member of the new Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. This involves deconstructing the myth of a pristine, homogeneous, top-down Communist-led resistance movement, through an emphasis on events at the regional, local and grass-roots levels across Bosnia and the diverse and contradictory elements that encompassed this movement. Reference is made where necessary and relevant to events at the all-Yugoslav level, since events in Bosnia cannot be understood in isolation from the wider Yugoslav whole. Yet at the same time, events in Bosnia cannot be viewed simply as part and parcel of this wider whole; there was a specifically Bosnian revolutionary dynamic, which this work seeks to illuminate.

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The revolution that took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina was a product both of the conditions created by the Axis invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941 and of longer-term developments. Following the Axis attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the Communist parties in Axis-occupied Europe were required by Moscow to wage active resistance against the occupiers. This was to be done by eschewing talk of revolution or class struggle that might alienate the Western Allies in favour of patriotic, anti-fascist themes. The Communists were required to build national anti-fascist resistance movements that co-opted 'bourgeois' elements opposed to fascism and to collaboration with it. In Yugoslavia this strategy built upon the foundation laid in the period of the so-called 'Popular Front', 1935–39, when the Communists had agitated on a similarly non-class, 'anti-fascist' basis against a Yugoslav regime that was drifting into the Nazi orbit. Given the Serbian-dominated character of the Yugoslav state, this anti-regime opposition on the part of the Communists took the form of support for the non-Serb nationalities' struggle for autonomy from Belgrade, as well as support for the Serb opposition to the Belgrade regime. In Bosnia, so far as the Serbs were concerned, the Communists attempted to work with members of the nationalist-populist 'League of Farmers' (*Savez Zemljoradnika*), laying the basis for the Partisans' initial alliance, in the early months of their uprising, with the extreme nationalist 'Chetnik' movement that was in some sense the political heir to the League of Farmers. But over and above this, the Communists in the second half of the 1930s agitated in favour of Bosnian autonomy and for a federal solution to the Yugoslav national question.

Since the 1920s, the KPJ had championed the national liberation of the non-Serb nations in Yugoslavia from the rule of the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav state. This included championing the liberation of Bosnia, whose autonomy had been steadily dismantled following the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918. With the renaming of the state as the 'Kingdom of Yugoslavia' and the promulgation of a new constitution on 3 October 1929 under the dictatorship of King Aleksandar, Bosnia was finally wiped off the map. This was engineered by the Bosnian Serb politician Milan Srđić, Aleksandar's Minister of Justice and a fierce opponent of Bosnian autonomy and Muslim autonomism, who divided the territory between four different *banovinas*, or provinces; in three of these the Serbs were in a majority and in the fourth the Croats were in a majority, leaving the Muslims, deliberately, as a minority in all four. The dismemberment of Bosnia was consolidated with the so-called Cvetković-Maček *Sporazum* (Agreement) of 26 August 1939, when the Belgrade regime reached a compromise with the Croatian national opposition that involved the establishment of an autonomous Croatian *banovina* within Yugoslavia, delineating the effective partition of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia. The KPJ now found itself campaigning for Bosnian unity and autonomy in a manner that paralleled that of the mainstream Muslim national opposition. The launch of the 'Muslim Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina' was sparked by Dr Džafer Kulenović, leader of the main Muslim party, the 'Yugoslav Muslim Organisation' (*Jugoslavenska Muslimanska Organizacija* [JMO]), who demanded at a press conference on 6 November 1939 that an autonomous Bosnian unit be established within Yugoslavia. This was to parallel the Croatian *banovina* established earlier that year, and the Serbian and Slovenian *banovinas* that were expected to be established

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soon. The Communists, too, supported the campaign for Bosnian autonomy, and identified all Bosnia's peoples, but particularly the Muslims, as the victims of Belgrade's agreement with the Croatian national opposition. Though the Communists took care to denounce the JMO for its history of collaboration with Belgrade, the boundary between the mainstream Muslim national opposition movement and the Communist opposition was inevitably blurred, particularly where Muslim youth was concerned; the teenage or student children of members of the Muslim elite were often Communists, but shared the national aspirations of their parents. This dual Bosnian movement of resistance and for autonomy would be replicated in the years of Axis occupation from 1941.

In April 1941 the Axis powers invaded and dismembered Yugoslavia. Bosnia-Hercegovina was incorporated into the newly proclaimed NDH, effectively a German-Italian condominium ruled through the Ustasas. The latter attempted to assimilate the Muslims into the Croat nation by declaring them to be Islamic Croats, while simultaneously carrying out a new dismemberment of Bosnia, which was now divided between twelve different administrative units or 'Great Župas' (*velike župe*). The goal of this division was to erase the border between Bosnia and Croatia. Some members of the Muslim elite who had campaigned for Bosnian autonomy under Yugoslavia, including Kulenović himself, now collaborated with the new order. Nevertheless, the best part of the Muslim elite was rapidly alienated from the Ustasha regime, both on account of its assimilation policy vis-à-vis the Muslims and, more important, because of the genocidal bloodbath it unleashed against the Jewish, Gypsy and above all Serb population of Bosnia. The Muslim elite opposed this bloodbath not only on ethical grounds, but also because it threatened catastrophe for the Muslims themselves, whom the Ustasas attempted with some success to drag into their war against the Serbs, and who were exposed to massive and bloody retaliation from Serb rebels. The Muslim struggle against national oppression and for the autonomy of Bosnia, which had flowered in the last years of the Yugoslav kingdom, therefore continued in opposition to the Ustasha regime. From the summer of 1941, armed uprisings of mostly Serb peasants broke out across Bosnia-Hercegovina against the Ustasha regime. The KPJ rapidly assumed the leading role in this rebellion. From 1941, therefore, there was a dual Bosnian resistance to the NDH.

Bosnia was in 1941 inhabited by three principal nationalities, but only the Muslims possessed a national political leadership. The Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat elites had been subsumed within the broader Serb and Croat elites, centred on Serbia and Croatia respectively, following the establishment of Yugoslavia in 1918. Although Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat politicians and intellectuals did not necessarily lose their Bosnian orientation and world-view, they did cease to belong to specifically Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat national elites. The Bosnian Serbs after 1918 fractured along different political lines—the People's Radical Party (*Narodna Radikalna Stranka*), League of Farmers, Democratic Party (*Demokratska Stranka*) and Independent Democratic Party (*Samostalna Demokratska Stranka*)—none of which was purely Bosnian, while the Bosnian Croats were soon mostly absorbed into the principal vehicle of Croatian national politics, the Croat Peasant Party (*Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka* [HSS]). When the Ustasha regime took power in Bosnia in April 1941, its persecution smashed the already fragmented

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Bosnian Serb elite, while the Bosnian Croats, as a satisfied irredentist group, became the section of the Croat nation most supportive of the new order. This left the door open to the Communists to rapidly become the leading element in the Bosnian Serb resistance. Conversely, in most areas the Bosnian Croats remained throughout the war relatively resistant to mobilisation in the NOP.

Among the Bosnian Serbs, resistance to Communist leadership of the anti-Ustasha rebellion rapidly developed in the form of the Chetnik movement, but this remained essentially a confederacy of autonomous bands, loosely under the umbrella of the Chetnik supreme command which, headed by Dragoljub 'Draža' Mihailović, was centred on Serbia and Montenegro. The Bosnian Chetniks were fragmented and mostly confined to operating in the countryside; their orientation was, for the most part, either localist or towards Serbia and the Serbian political class. Throughout 1943 they were militarily broken by defeats at the hands of the Partisans and Germans between March and May and by the loss of their chief ally with Italy's capitulation to the Allies in September.

It was the Communist-led NOP on the one hand and the mainstream Muslim autonomist movement on the other that comprised Bosnia's two resistance movements; that is, two autochthonous movements that resisted Bosnia's incorporation in the NDH and that sought its restoration as an autonomous entity in some form. Although the Muslim autonomists were not a resistance movement in the sense of being anti-fascist, anti-Nazi or anti-occupier—they were none of these—they were a resistance movement in the sense of being anti-Ustasha and anti-NDH. The most notorious Muslim quisling unit—the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Volunteer Bosnian-Herzegovinian Division (Croatia), better known as the '*Handschar*' or '*Handžar*' Division, to which this book devotes some attention—was, like the Partisans, the repository of hopes for Bosnian autonomy on the part of sections of the Muslim population; the Bosnian autonomist goal was, ironically, shared by the Communist-led Bosnian resistance movement and by the Muslim supporters of its Bosnian Nazi antithesis. Indeed the Ustashes came to view the Muslim-autonomist threat represented by the Handschar Division so seriously that, according to the latter's commander Colonel Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig, they deemed the Muslims in the SS units, not the Partisans, to be the 'state enemy no. 1'.<sup>18</sup>

This book is the story of Bosnia's dual resistance movements, the NOP and the Muslim autonomists; of how the first triumphed by subsuming part of the second; and of how this related to the broader Yugoslav resistance movement and impacted upon the founding and construction of the new Yugoslav federal state that emerged from the war and revolution. To take power in Bosnia, the NOP needed to take the Bosnian towns; to do this, it needed to win the support of part of the Muslim population; to do this in turn required it to co-opt elements of the Muslim elite; and to win the support of Muslims of all classes required firm and open support for the principle of Bosnian autonomy. The KPJ entered World War II already committed in principle to a federal Yugoslavia that would include a self-governing Bosnia in some form. The need to win the political and military battle against domestic wartime opponents—the Ustashes, the Chetniks and the Muslim autonomist mainstream—required it to uphold and extend this commitment, both in its propaganda and in its organisation of the NOP in Bosnia. In other words, to win control of Bosnia, the KPJ had to organise a specifically

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Bosnian national-liberation struggle, one that would appeal to the crucial Muslim population.

This ensured, in turn, that in the new Yugoslav federation Bosnia would have an equal place as a republic in its own right, its status explicitly guaranteed by the founding documents of the new state. Thus the Bosnian Partisans on 25–26 November 1943 convened an assembly, the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Bosne i Hercegovine* [ZAVNOBiH]), as a representative and legislative body for Bosnia. This was immediately followed by the Second Session of AVNOJ, at which the new Yugoslav state was formally constituted on a federal basis, within which Bosnia-Herzegovina's place was formally recognised. Finally, at the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH held on 30 June–2 July 1944, the modern Bosnian state was formally established. Following the liberation of Sarajevo by the Partisans on 6 April 1945, ZAVNOBiH and all central organs of Bosnian statehood were moved there. Initially named simply 'federal Bosnia-Herzegovina', the new state was renamed the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and retained this name until 1963. At the end of 1946 a constitution was promulgated for Bosnia, by which time the new state possessed a presidency, government, parliament, judiciary, flag and coat of arms.

This meant that over and above the difficult task of winning the war and seizing power, the Communists were faced with the scarcely less difficult task of constructing a Bosnian republic within a Yugoslav federation. They had to build a Bosnian state from a nationally heterogeneous population, wide sections of which had engaged in genocidal crimes against other sections. They had to reconcile the numerically dominant Serb element in their movement with the less numerous but equally important Muslim element and ensure at least some participation by the Croats and smaller groups, such as the Poles and Ukrainians. They had to mobilise the most politically marginalised section of the Bosnian population—the female half. They had to devise a patriotic ideology and symbolism that would appeal to the best part of the population of all nationalities and provide a genuine underpinning to the new order. And they had to coordinate all this with the parallel process of state-building in the other Yugoslav lands—Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia—as well as in the territories that were destined not to become republics: Vojvodina, Kosovo and the Sanjak.

The Yugoslav Partisans established a Yugoslav executive and legislature in the form of AVNOJ, founded in the predominantly Muslim town of Bihać in north-west Bosnia in November 1942. A year later, at the Second Session of AVNOJ at Jajce, the new Yugoslav state was formally declared. In this federal state-building process, Bosnia was, more than any other Yugoslav land, the keystone. Not only was Bosnia the seat of the Yugoslav Partisan Supreme Staff and the KPJ Central Committee from the end of 1941 until mid-1944, except for a brief period in the spring of 1943; the Bosnian question was also central to the Yugoslav national question as a whole, the one could not be resolved without the other. Disputed between Serbia and Croatia and between the Serb, Croat and Muslim national movements, Bosnia was the central battlefield of Yugoslav interwar politics and the Communists were aware that a just resolution of the Bosnian question was necessary not only for the temporary success of their movement in Bosnia but for the

future of their entire project in Yugoslavia as a whole. The KPJ and the NOP would stand or fall on the issue of Bosnia.

This book, therefore, discusses the foundation of federal Yugoslavia and the role of Bosnia and the Muslims in this process. It aims to recount some of the most important chapters in the story of the Yugoslav Revolution. The Bosnian Revolution serves as both exemplar and example of the broader Yugoslav Revolution; at the micro level, the method by which the NOP operated in the villages, towns and localities of Bosnia will tell us something about the nature of this revolutionary movement that stretched from Slovenia to Macedonia and beyond to other Balkan countries. For the Yugoslav Revolution of 1941–45 was not an aberration, but was part of a wider revolutionary movement that flowered across the western and southern Balkans in the 1940s, growing out of the Communist-led resistance movement to the Axis powers in Albania and Greece as well as Yugoslavia. The peculiar political and socio-economic conditions of the western Balkans, the region's ethnically heterogeneous character and the policies of the occupying powers combined to generate powerful Communist-led insurgencies in all three countries that were ultimately successful in Albania and Yugoslavia but, thanks to British and US intervention, unsuccessful in Greece. A much weaker Communist-led resistance movement also operated in Bulgaria.

Furthermore, by discussing how the Bosnian republic and the Yugoslav federation came into being in the 1940s, this book will shed light on the way in which these entities were destroyed in the 1990s. Some of the key players in Bosnian politics in the 1980s and 1990s appear in this book, most notably the two great rivals for leadership of the Bosnian Muslims, Adil Zulfikarpašić and Alija Izetbegović. Although he was still a teenager when the war ended, the latter's World War II reputation has been tarnished by the rumour that he recruited for the SS. At the time of writing, this rumour remains wholly unsubstantiated.<sup>19</sup> In this book, Izetbegović appears as a youthful zealot of the radical Young Muslim organisation, who was eventually prosecuted under the Communist regime not as a war criminal or collaborator, but because of his political opposition to the regime. Zulfikarpašić, by contrast, served as a junior minister in the first post-war Bosnian government and his role in this story is, as shall be seen, not an insignificant one. But above and beyond the overlap in *dramatis personae* between the wars in Bosnia of the 1940s and 1990s, the recreation of Bosnia and Yugoslavia in the 1940s and their destruction in the 1990s are reflections of one another, and it is impossible to properly understand one without some understanding of the other. It is hoped that reading this book will convince the reader of this fateful connection.



## THE DUAL BOSNIAN RESISTANCE

c. APRIL 1941–APRIL 1943

*Some of you may wonder whether the Muslim issue is important enough for the King to devote so much attention to it. I shall state categorically that it really is that important. Lessons should be learnt from our recent past. Remember that it was precisely in Bosnia that the Partisans established themselves and became a real threat, domestically and internationally.*

Speech of Yugoslavia's deposed King Petar II to the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-Serb Congress  
in Chicago, 29 June 1963<sup>1</sup>

The Axis occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the establishment of the NDH amounted to an assault on the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina; not merely on the Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, who were subject to genocide, but also on the Muslims and the Croats. Bosnia-Herzegovina was partitioned between different districts (Great Župas), with the intention of erasing its historical borders and identity, while the Muslim people were subjected to a policy of forced assimilation into the Croatian nation. Towards the NDH's non-Serb majority, the Ustasha regime was brutal, corrupt, oppressive and incompetent; its genocide of the Serbs left the Muslim and Croat population vulnerable to savage Serb-rebel retaliation. The German and Italian occupiers treated the puppet state as a colony to be exploited. The regime and the occupiers failed to protect the Muslim and Croat population from the terror and depredations of the Chetniks; or even, in the case of the Italians, aided and abetted them. Meanwhile, the Ustasas marginalised the mainstream Muslim political elite, ruling Bosnia instead through Catholic Croats and through unrepresentative Muslim fringe elements. These factors together generated resistance in Bosnia among Muslims, and to a lesser extent among Croats, that grew steadily as the war progressed.

During the first two years of the Axis occupation of Bosnia, different segments of the Muslim elite sought to resist the Ustasha regime, or at least to ease its



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oppression, in different ways, from agitating from within it for a change in policy, through appealing over its head to the Germans or Italians, to forming separate Muslim armed formations and collaborating with the Chetniks or Partisans. Whatever form it took, this resistance was aimed at protecting the Muslim people—their individuality, interests and security, as its protagonists saw them. It constituted a specifically Bosnian anti-Ustasha (though not anti-fascist, anti-Nazi or anti-occupier) current of resistance, that paralleled and overlapped with the Communist-led People's Liberation Movement (NOP). The latter was, in this period, focused primarily on the guerrilla struggle in the countryside of the predominantly Serb Bosnian Partisan bands. Yet the NOP's underground agitation and activity in the occupied towns and cities of Bosnia marked the beginnings of a genuinely multinational, pan-Bosnian resistance movement. Both the Communists and the Muslim autonomists shared a commitment to Bosnian self-rule; the Communists' Bosnian-patriotic platform acted as a beacon by which the discontented members of the Muslim elite and sections of the Muslim population could be drawn towards the NOP. The Ustashes were therefore faced with two parallel and overlapping movements of resistance to the NDH that were specifically Bosnian in orientation.

### *The Axis, the NDH and Bosnia-Herzegovina*

The establishment of the NDH and the demarcation of its borders were determined entirely by Hitler's perception of German interests, perceived above all in terms of the importance of Bosnia's railways and mineral resources and the need to appease his Italian ally. The NDH, incorporating all of Bosnia, was essentially an Italo-German buffer-state that was formally divided down the middle into Italian and German zones of influence, but in which Germany's influence steadily grew at Italy's expense as the war progressed. Nevertheless, the basic lack of any great German interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina resulted in a relatively light German presence in the territory and a correspondingly greater freedom of action for native factions: the Ustashes, the Chetniks, Muslim autonomists and even the Partisans. Meanwhile, the form of Axis rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina, wholly disregarding as it did the feelings and aspirations of the Bosnian people, explains in large part the extreme dissatisfaction of the latter with the new order, dissatisfaction that ultimately found expression in mass popular resistance. Axis callousness towards and neglect and exploitation of Bosnia and Croatia, coupled with Ustasha brutality, repressiveness and incompetence, were the initial motor generating support for this resistance; while the division of authority and jurisdiction between the Germans, Italians and Ustashes further complicated their respective efforts to suppress the latter.

The Ustasha regime, which was required to rule Bosnia on behalf of the Axis, thus inherited the problem of how to govern a nationally divided country where it enjoyed only minimal popular support. The Ustasha model, of an integral Great Croatia incorporating the whole of Bosnia, required that the latter be forcibly assimilated, contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of its inhabitants. Consequently, the regime viewed all manifestations of Bosnian autonomism as a threat; it attempted to obliterate Bosnia-Herzegovina as an administrative entity in order

to facilitate its assimilation. The NDH was in June divided into twenty-two Great Župas, each headed by a Great Župan (*veliki župan*). Seven of these had centres within Bosnia-Hercegovina: Vrhbosna (Sarajevo); Usora and Soli (Tuzla); Sana and Luka (Banja Luka); Pliva and Rama (Jajce); Lašva and Glaž (Travnik); Krbava and Psat (Bihać); and Hum (Mostar). The last two included territory outside Bosnia-Hercegovina. Five more Great Župas included Bosnian territory but had centres outside Bosnia-Hercegovina: Bribir and Sidraga (Knin); Dubrava (Dubrovnik); Gora (Petrinja); Livac and Zapolje (Nova Gradiška); and Posavje (Slavonski Brod). This division was designed to erase the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina, both administratively and in the minds of the people.<sup>2</sup>

To expedite the digestion of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Pavelić used prominent Bosnian Muslims and Croats as window dressing for his regime. The first government of the NDH, formally appointed on 15 April, included Osman Kulenović, Džafer's brother, as Deputy Prime Minister. The central body of the Ustasha movement was the General Ustasha Council, formally constituted in early May. Its highest ranking members after Pavelić himself held the title of *doglavnik* (deputy leader). After Mile Budak, Pavelić's fellow Ustasha émigré, the first two *doglavniks* appointed were two elderly Bosnian politicians from the pre-Yugoslav era, the Croat-oriented Muslim Ademaga Mešić and the Croat Jozo Sunarić. The rank below *doglavnik* was that of *pobočnik* (adjutant), which included Alija Šuljak and Hakija Hadžić, formerly the leaders of the Muslim Branch of the Croat Peasant Party. Hadžić was the dominant Muslim Ustasha in Bosnia-Hercegovina and was Pavelić's agent for the mobilisation of the Muslims into the Ustasha movement. His purge from the state apparatus of the older, politically mainstream Muslim notables began the process by which the Muslim elite would be wholly alienated from the NDH.<sup>3</sup>

As it happened, all levels of the NDH apparatus, its armed forces and the Ustasha movement would be wholly dominated by Catholic Croats, while Muslims were unrepresented at all of them. Those Muslims who did hold prominent positions in the NDH were generally window dressing, chosen for that reason; the octogenarian *doglavnik* Ademaga Mešić admitted publicly in October 1941 that he had no policy ambitions, since 'throughout my entire life I have worked towards one single goal: that Bosnia be Croatian. And she has become that. What more do I need?... I have achieved what I wanted: the Independent State of Croatia has been established and now I can peacefully give up my ghost'.<sup>4</sup> According to the historian Mehmedalija Bojić, among the three hundred Ustasha émigrés who arrived back in Croatia alongside Pavelić in April 1941, there was not a single Muslim; of the eight *doglavniks* only one was a Muslim; none of the 'Poglavnik's aides' was Muslim; of twenty-two Great Župans there was only one Muslim, and he was in the post only briefly; at the foundation of the NDH, at the district level, not a single Muslim held the rank of *logornik*, while at the municipal level only a handful held the rank of *tabornik*; there were no Muslim functionaries in the Ustasha youth movement; of two and a half thousand organised Ustashes in Sarajevo only 151 were Muslims; of two thousand in Banja Luka only twenty were Muslims; in the Ustasha Supreme Command, General Staff of the Home Guards and Ministry of the Home Guards, as well as in the staffs of corps and divisions there were no Muslim officers, while only one regiment had a Muslim com-



Map 1: The Partition of Yugoslavia, 1941.

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mander (and he was a Partisan collaborator who would become a government minister in Tito's Yugoslavia).<sup>5</sup>

Under Jure Francetić, Chief Ustasha Commissioner for Bosnia-Herzegovina, were Ustasha commissioners for Banja Luka, Travnik, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Doboj, Livno, Mostar and Eastern Herzegovina; of the eight only two were Muslims.<sup>6</sup> These were charged with the organisation of Ustasha bodies across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ustasha bodies were established at the level of the Great Župa, district, municipality and village, mirroring the administrative organisation of the state. The resulting conflict and rivalry between officials of the Ustasha movement and those of the state at the local level greatly assisted the NOP, with which state bureaucrats frequently collaborated. The new Ustasha officialdom represented a hastily improvised layer made up largely of unrepresentative outsiders and crudely imposed on the populations of Bosnia's cities and towns. Incompetent, corrupt, exploitative and lacking in consideration for the subject population, they widely and rapidly alienated the population from the regime. In Sarajevo, for example, the high Ustasha officials Hakiya Hadžić and Božidar Bralo sidelined, harassed and even jailed local politicians and notables, up to and including Archbishop Ivan Šarić and Reis ul-ulema Fehim Spaho, trampling over their autonomy, competencies and sensibilities. To varying degrees, these Ustasha officials roughly and arbitrarily sidelined, tampered with, infiltrated or sought to control the Islamic Religious Community, Sharia courts, mosques, the Catholic Church and the Franciscan order.<sup>7</sup>

Following the tradition of Ante Starčević, the nineteenth-century father of integral Croat nationalism, the Ustasha regime formally viewed the Muslims as the purest of Croats, and the supposed Islamic heritage of the Croat nation was therefore celebrated. The Banja Luka Ustasha newspaper *Hrvatska Krajina* boasted that the 'little Croat nation is divided between two worlds, a majority Western and Catholic and a minority Eastern and Islamic. We are the only nation in Europe that embraces two such different cultural and religious elements.' Of these two wings of the Croat nation, the Muslim part was the 'most pure-blooded, for while the Catholic part of the Croats was considerably infiltrated by the influx of foreign elements—German, Czech, Magyar, Italian, Slovene and so forth—the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims intermarried exclusively among themselves'.<sup>8</sup> When Slavko Kvaternik, Commander of the Armed Forces of the NDH, arrived in Sarajevo on 24 April, he issued a proclamation assuring the Muslims that the *Poglavnik* viewed them as 'our most pure-blooded Croatian sons. Kvaternik promised that 'for all time the Muslim home will remain free, for the first and the last Croat will die before we abandon you'.<sup>9</sup> The following day, Kvaternik presented Reis-ul ulema Fehim efendi Spaho with a message promising the Muslims freedom and equality within the NDH. On 29 April 1941, Pavelić ordered that the office of the deputy prime minister should be transferred to Banja Luka; this took place on 4 May. This was intended to be the prelude to the transfer of the NDH's capital from Zagreb to Banja Luka as the geographical centre of the new country. Zagreb was declared to be only a 'provisional capital city', whereas 'Banja Luka dominates in sovereign fashion the whole of our territory'.<sup>10</sup> This move was destined never to take place on account of the Serb uprising against the NDH, which made Banja Luka too militarily vulnerable, so Bosnia would be ruled until

the end of the war from the non-Bosnian city of Zagreb. In August 1941, the regime ordered the construction of a mosque in Zagreb, which was converted from the former Museum of Fine Arts designed by Ivan Meštrović and finally opened in August 1944. Yet Starčevićist window-dressing notwithstanding, it soon became clear to most Muslims that the NDH was an alien state in which their position was a subordinate one.

Ustasha rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina rested, in the last resort, on military force, without which the mass of the Bosnian population would not have tolerated this unrepresentative dictatorship of extremists. The Ustashes were a fringe movement in pre-war Croatia with an estimated membership of roughly two thousand on the eve of the Axis invasion.<sup>11</sup> Despite the Ustashes' hostility towards the HSS and distrust of its paramilitary Peasant Defence force, their numerical weakness forced them to rely upon sympathetic units of the latter during their seizure of power in April 1941. The virtual absence of Peasant Defence units in the parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina outside the former Banovina Croatia meant that the Ustasha seizure of these territories took the form of an invasion, with Peasant Defence units assembled in Zagreb for this purpose. On 20 April, approximately 800 members of the Peasant Defence and 300 policemen, some or all of whom were organised in a 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian detachment', were sent from Zagreb into Bosnia-Herzegovina, arriving via Banja Luka in Sarajevo four days later.<sup>12</sup> The importance attached to Bosnia-Herzegovina, combined with the weakness of the NDH state organs on Bosnian territory, thereafter ensured that the Ustasha regime would concentrate its military forces there.

The NDH's armed forces consisted principally of two wings: the Home Guard (regular army) and the Ustasha Militia, a division that in one sense corresponds to that between the Wehrmacht and SS in Nazi Germany, although the poor organisation, equipment and morale of the Home Guard made it in another sense the polar opposite of the Wehrmacht. A third wing of the NDH's armed forces was the Gendarmerie, reconstituted from the gendarmerie of the former Yugoslavia on Croatian and Bosnian territory; it was devoted to internal repression and initially shared a command with the Home Guard, but was in late June transferred to the Ustasha Militia.

The NDH's official status as an 'independent state' hampered the efforts of the Axis occupiers to suppress the resistance, for repression was supposed to be conducted by the NDH's own organs, and in this they manifestly failed. The armed forces of the NDH consisted of approximately 70,000 Home Guards, 15,000 Ustasha Militiamen and 8,000 Gendarmes by the end of 1941.<sup>13</sup> These forces increased significantly in subsequent years: by September 1943 there were 92,246 Croatian troops under NDH command and 170,080 Croatian troops under German command.<sup>14</sup> Yet the largeness of these figures was a reflection of the NDH's weakness, not strength. The Home Guards were among the most poorly equipped and unenthusiastic soldiers in the history of modern warfare, and were rapidly and thoroughly infiltrated by the NOP. At the same time, the division of the NDH into German and Italian zones inevitably produced rivalry between the two occupying powers, which ensured that neither could establish efficient control of the territory in a manner comparable to the control by the Germans in Serbia or even by the Italians in Albania. Pavelić's regime became increasingly German-oriented

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after the establishment of the NDH, while the Italians, following the outbreak of the Serb uprising in the summer, switched to a pro-Chetnik policy aimed at destabilising the NDH in order to create the conditions for the extension of Italian control.

The NDH's 'independence' was at all times a sham: it was never recognised by any non-Axis country except Franco's Spain and at the Nuremberg Trials it was declared to be merely an expression of the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia. In practice, it was treated like a colony by the Germans and Italians, its economic resources mercilessly exploited. Croatian raw materials, industrial installations and military assets were systematically and continuously seized and plundered by the Axis powers, particularly by the Germans. The NDH was forced to pay Germany a share of the Yugoslav debt, while foreign trade between the NDH and the Axis powers was manipulated at the NDH's expense. Customs duties between Italy and the NDH were abolished on 27 October 1941. The NDH had to pay for the costs of the German and Italian occupation of its territory; although the NDH was not formally 'occupied' in Axis eyes, the costs it bore were in practice similar to those borne by neighbouring, formally occupied Serbia. It had, in addition, to feed and house the German and Italian troops on its territory and provide civilian labour power for German military needs. The cost of financing the German and Italian occupation put massive strain on the NDH's economy, generating rampant inflation. By the end of 1943 controlled prices had risen about 500 per cent and black-market prices by about 3,000 per cent above the average controlled price in 1941.

Meanwhile, the Germans imported Croatian labour from both their own and the Italian zones of the NDH into Germany proper to work on farms, in mines and in factories. In the first part of the war Croatian labourers were used for the lowest forms of work and many Croatian women became prostitutes. The German authorities often bypassed their Croatian counterparts altogether in their use of Croatian labour, and as the war progressed they increasingly resorted simply to rounding up and seizing the inhabitants of entire Croatian villages and transporting them to the Reich in sealed trains. In total, about 150–160,000 Croatian citizens went voluntarily to the Reich to work and an unknown number went as slave or effectively slave labour. Given the large proportion of the able-bodied inhabitants of the NDH already enrolled in the armed forces, this represented a considerable drain on the manpower resources of the puppet state. Italy also exploited Croatian labour and perhaps 70–90,000 people from all parts of Italian-occupied Yugoslavia and Albania were detained in Italian concentration camps in these territories, some of whom were employed as forced labour.

Even before the outbreak of the civil war in the summer of 1941, the NDH barely possessed the agricultural resources sufficient to feed its inhabitants. Only its north-east corner, the territories of Srijem and Eastern Slavonia, was a food-surplus area, while all other parts of the country were food-deficit areas. Civil war inevitably made an adequate supply of food to the population impossible. The flight of refugees from the countryside to the towns, rebel control over large food-producing areas, the rebel cutting of transport lines and rebel sieges combined with massive inflation to produce serious food shortages in the towns of the NDH. The efforts of the regime to force peasants to cultivate specific crops and



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to impose compulsory delivery quotas on food products could not resolve the problem, while imports from Romania and elsewhere were sufficient only to avoid the complete collapse of the NDH government and armed forces. Shortages of food and other goods created a lively smuggling trade, exacerbated by the fact that German military personnel were not subject to inspection by the NDH's customs officials, while Croatian peasants hoarded food rather than sell it for inflated currency at official prices. While the state supply of food dwindled, black-market food prices rose exponentially: compared with prices in August 1939, official food prices in the NDH's capital of Zagreb had risen by 83 times and black-market food prices by 218 times by December 1944.<sup>15</sup>

The Axis economic exploitation of the NDH was paralleled by the total political and military subordination of the puppet state to the policies of the occupiers. On 7 September 1942, a German-NDH agreement placed the NDH's military forces in the German zone under German military command. From January 1943, German commanders in the NDH enjoyed the right to alter existing Croatian legislation at will, leading Eugen Dido Kvaternik, the Ustasha security chief and one of the architects of the Ustasha genocide, to admit later that there remained nothing 'independent' about the NDH except the 'N' in its name.<sup>16</sup> So far as the Italians were concerned, they further divided their share of the NDH into the so-called Zones II and III (Zone I being the part of Croatia they annexed outright). They then occupied the whole of Zones II and III in the summer and autumn of 1941, expelling the NDH's armed forces from the territory and assuming control of the civilian administration in the process. Although in an agreement with the NDH on 19 June 1942 they restored to it civilian and military authority in Zone III and civilian authority in Zone II, they remained in occupation of Zone II and, furthermore, required the NDH to recognise formally the Chetnik formations that the Italians had proclaimed, the 'Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia', without any right to retaliate against them for previous Chetnik actions. The Italians retained the right to countermand any order of the Croatian civilian authorities in either Zone; to reoccupy both Zones at will; to maintain control over the Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia; and to retain control of all railways.

These rights of the occupiers, grossly violating the NDH's alleged sovereignty, were insult added to injury. The Axis exploitation and oppression of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, through the Ustasha puppet-state, provide the background to the growing Croat and Muslim resistance to the NDH. Runaway inflation, food shortages resulting in virtual starvation, killings, beatings, kidnappings, random arrests and all-round chaos fed the growing resistance to the NDH among all nationalities contained within it. Of course, Ustasha oppression did not hit Muslims and Croats as hard as it hit others; soon after taking power, the Ustashes embarked on a policy of genocide which, in conjunction with the Nazi Holocaust with which it overlapped, claimed the lives of at least 30,000 Jews, a similar number of Gypsies and perhaps nearly 300,000 Serbs. The rebellion of the Serbs in response to this genocide was the spearhead of the resistance that found expression in the NOP. But it was only when this resistance widened to incorporate Muslims and Croats that it eventually succeeded.

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### *The Serb uprising and the birth of the Bosnian Partisan movement*

The KPJ began to plan resistance to the occupiers immediately following the conquest of Yugoslavia. Yet the Communists, as an urban- and proletarian-based movement, imagined that the industrial working-class would form the mainstay of the resistance. This assumption was upset as a result of the Ustasas' genocidal persecution of the Serbs, resulting in a string of massacres of Serb peasants across the central part of Croatia proper and, to a lesser extent, Bosnia-Herzegovina and other parts of the NDH. This forced the Serb peasantry into an armed struggle for survival, one that overshadowed the resistance in the cities and towns.

Despite being surprised by the scale and character of the Serb-peasant uprising in Bosnia that broke out in the summer of 1941, the Communists entered it with a well-developed command structure they had been developing since the Axis occupation. Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, the delegate of Tito's General Staff for the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, headed the Provincial Military Staff for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The latter, in turn, had authority over four *oblast*-level Military Staffs, for Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bosanska Krajina and Herzegovina, respectively. These had authority, in turn, over district-level Military Commissioners who had authority over village-level Military Commissioners. In September, the Bosnian Partisan command was renamed the General Staff of the People's Liberation Partisan Detachments of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This pyramidal organisation formed the nucleus of the Partisan movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because it was organised on a Bosnian basis, united under a Bosnian centre and organised by ethnically mixed Bosnian Communist cadres, the Partisan movement it came to lead would necessarily adopt a specifically Bosnian character at the organisational level.

KPJ propaganda attempted to mobilise Bosnians of all nationalities behind the NOP by appealing to a specifically and exclusively Bosnian patriotism, one that was equally relevant to Croats, Muslims and Serbs. The Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina's proclamation of mid June 1941 was addressed to the Working People of Bosnia-Herzegovina, rather than to the workers of Yugoslavia as a whole. It stated: 'The prisons are full of people's fighters across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina who are being killed on all sides'. It accused the occupiers and Ustasas of wanting to 'exterminate the Serb people in our lands', while 'Bosnia-Herzegovina is roamed by bands of armed criminals and most evil types who kill, plunder and threaten without any responsibility'. The Provincial Committee thus appealed to a purely Bosnian audience against both the genocide of the Bosnian Serbs and the oppression of the common Bosnian homeland. There was no appeal to Yugoslav patriotism or to a Yugoslav homeland—only in the slogans at the proclamation's end were there references to the 'unity of the working class of Yugoslavia' and to the 'independence of the peoples of Yugoslavia'. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the homeland in whose name the Provincial Committee patriotically denounced the Axis and Ustasas.<sup>17</sup>

The oppression of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Axis and Ustasas was linked to the oppression it had suffered in the interwar period under Serbian rule: 'Working people of Bosnia-Herzegovina! For twenty years the Great Serbian rulers plundered your country... Today Bosnia-Herzegovina has again become an enslaved



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Map 2: The Independent State of Croatia, 1941–1945.

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province that is being plundered, with even greater abandon and terror, by the Croatian Frankist [i.e. Ustasha] rulers'. The proclamation appealed individually to each Bosnian nationality (Serbs, Muslims, Croats and Jews), each of which received an individual paragraph. To the Bosnian Serbs, the Provincial Committee appealed not on a Serb nationalist but on a Bosnian platform, stressing how the pre-war regime in Belgrade had exploited then abandoned them: 'For twenty years the rulers from Belgrade cheated you. They incited among you chauvinistic hatred towards the Croats and Muslims in order to rule. They created fratricidal slaughter. And today—thinking only of their robbery—they have betrayed you to the foreign enemy'. In order to defeat this new enemy, therefore: 'The Communist Party calls upon all the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina to end the fighting, hatred and bloodletting among themselves—the latter is what the occupiers and plunderers want, for only in that way can they hold power'.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the Communists in Bosnia attempted to stir resistance using Bosnian-patriotic rhetoric; although armed resistance was initially confined predominantly to the Serbs, use of this rhetoric eventually enabled the Communists to recruit Muslim and Croat fighters as well.

The Communist leadership of the Serb rebellion did not go unchallenged: it came under attack from nationalist Serb elements who straddled the border between conservatism and radical populism, composed of former army officers, gendarmes, merchants, Orthodox priests, politicians of the League of Farmers and other local notables. Whereas the Communists sought to build a resistance movement that would combat the German and Italian occupiers as well as the Ustashes, and would encompass Muslims and Croats as well as Serbs, the Serb conservative-populists had opposite goals: they sought to reach an accommodation with the occupiers, concentrate rebel action against the Ustashes alone and take the opportunity to resolve the Bosnian national question on a Great Serb basis, through exterminating, expelling or forcibly assimilating the non-Serb population. In late August and September, the Italians responded to the rebellion and to the Ustasha failure to suppress it by reoccupying their zone of the NDH and, in the process, they sought to reach an accord with elements among the rebels amenable to collaboration. This provided a catalyst to the latent conflict within the rebellion between its pro-Communist and its nationalist wings, which grew into the civil war between the Partisans and the Chetniks.<sup>19</sup>

In the short-term, the predominantly Serb composition of the Partisan rank-and-file, its propensity to terrorise, loot and kill Muslim and Croat civilians, and the Partisans' alliance with the Chetniks who engaged in such atrocities on a larger scale, all militated against the recruitment of Muslims and Croats to the Partisans in Bosnia. In mid October 1941, the Partisans of Romanija in East Bosnia had established a Muslim Company under the command of the local Communist Mujo Hodžić-Crni. In December, the unit was promoted to a Muslim Battalion, and numbered 250 by the end of the month. It was recruited from the inhabitants of the villages of Šatorovići and Osovo, whose political allegiance to the Serb-dominated League of Farmers before World War II rather than to the JMO, something that was uncharacteristic for Muslims, laid the basis for their participation in the Serb uprising against the Ustashes. Yet the unit was feared and distrusted by the Chetniks who were then in alliance with the Partisans, and many

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of its fighters deserted in the face of Chetnik attacks on Muslim villages and the failure of the Partisans to retaliate, while Hodžić allegedly responded to Serb-rebel hostility by turning to the Ustashas for support and received from them weapons and munitions. Meanwhile the Ustasha commander for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Jure Francetić, organised mostly Muslim refugees from East Bosnia who had fled before the Chetnik knife in his Black Legion for combat against the rebels. Numbering 1–1,500 highly motivated troops determined to defend their homes, the Black Legion routed both the Partisans and the Chetniks in East Bosnia in the spring of 1942.<sup>20</sup> The self-defeating nature of a resistance movement that was based purely on the Serbs and failed to defend the interests of the Muslims as well was made plain to the Communists in Bosnia.

Bosnia-Herzegovina became the centre of operations of the entire Yugoslav Partisan movement in late 1941, when Tito, the Partisan Supreme Staff and the KPJ Central Committee retreated to East Bosnia following their expulsion from Serbia by the Germans. Fighting had already broken out during the summer and autumn of 1941 between the Partisans and the Chetniks in Serbia, and the arrival of Tito's command in East Bosnia was a decisive catalyst for the spread of the Partisan-Chetnik conflict there. In turn, the Partisan movement in East Bosnia began to collapse in the spring of 1942 under the weight of the military assault of the occupiers and Ustashas and of the military and political assault of the Chetniks. The successive Partisan defeats in Serbia and East Bosnia and Herzegovina necessitated a 'long march' by the Partisan main force to Bosanska Krajina (West Bosnia), far from the Chetnik centre of gravity in Serbia. Croatia and Bosanska Krajina together formed the strongest bastion of the Partisan movement and the implantation there of Tito's defeated main force represented the Partisan leadership's recognition of this reality. Croatia itself would be until late in 1944 the single greatest source of Partisan manpower under the leadership of the powerful Communist Party of Croatia (*Komunistička partija Hrvatske* [KPH]). Yet the Yugoslav Partisan command was seated in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the best part of the war, from late 1941 until the spring of 1944, excluding a brief and abortive excursion into Montenegro in the spring of 1943.

Chetnik agitation and propaganda undermined the Partisan guerrilla forces by appealing to the overwhelmingly Serb rank and file on a Serb-nationalist basis, accusing the Communists of being an anti-Serb (Croat, 'Turkish' and Jewish) force and appealing to them to join the Chetnik struggle for a Great Serbia. In the face of this agitation, large parts of the Bosnian Partisan army in East Bosnia went over to the Chetniks in the spring of 1942, with mutinous Partisans often murdering their Communist commanders and political commissars in the process. The Communists responded to these Chetnik inroads into the Partisan movement by moving away from a primarily military strategy directed against the Ustashas and occupiers to one that was more political and directed against the Chetniks. This involved increasing efforts to mobilise Muslims and Croats into the Partisans alongside Serbs and to import the more civic-minded and 'Bosnian' workers and students from the towns into the Partisan ranks to counterbalance the predominantly Serb and xenophobic peasant base. This was coupled with increasing efforts to build a Bosnian Communist organisation within the Partisan ranks to bind the rank-and-file together in a disciplined manner. Organisationally and ideologically,

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the Bosnian Partisan units would be turned from Serb rebel bands into a multi-national, pan-Bosnian military force.

The disintegration of the Partisan detachments in East Bosnia accelerated the concentration of the cream of the Partisans into the so-called Proletarian or Shock units. These were disciplined, mobile units composed of the most reliable and politically aware Partisans, those least prone to chauvinism against Muslims or anybody else and most committed to the Communists' goals, including the goal of a free Bosnia-Hercegovina. The Staff of the Group of Shock Battalions issued a proclamation on 16 June 1942 describing their fighters as the 'bravest and most loyal sons of Bosnia-Hercegovina', made up of the 'best fighters from the ranks of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats... all of them are linked by a great love for their common homeland that groans enslaved under foreign boots. All of them are linked by a single thought, by a single wish, and that is to liberate and reconcile our tormented and bloody Bosnia-Hercegovina'. It declared to the 'Serbs and Muslims' that 'for ages the foreigner has misled and plundered your common homeland Bosnia-Hercegovina' and called upon them to 'unite in a just and holy struggle' to 'guarantee our common homeland Bosnia-Hercegovina happier days and a better future'. It ended with the slogans 'Long live the Serbs and Muslims in the struggle against the common enemy! Long live liberated and reconciled Herceg-Bosna! Long live the people's liberation struggle of all the peoples of Yugoslavia!'<sup>21</sup> The emphasis on the 'Serbs and Muslims', rather than on the Croats, was because relatively few Croats lived in East Bosnia.

Parallel to the growth of the Bosnian Partisan armed forces was the growth of an embryonic Bosnian Partisan civilian state. The basic building-block of this state was the People's Liberation Council (*narodnooslobodilački odbor*, NOO), established on territory liberated by the Partisans. The purpose of the NOOs was to represent the local population, exercise civilian government and mobilise resources for the Partisans. They were elected under the close supervision of the Communists wherever possible, but in practice the village-level NOOs tended to reflect the influence of the dominant local individuals and families who collaborated with the Partisans, and these were not necessarily Communists. The NOOs therefore represented a synthesis between traditional peasant-rebel government and Communist state organisation. In its 'Foča Regulations' of February 1942, the Supreme Staff set a standard form that NOOs were to adhere to, while stipulating that they were to be established only at the village, town, municipal and district levels. However, the following autumn, as the Communists became more ambitious, the 'September Regulations' permitted the establishment of NOOs for larger administrative units—*okrugs* and *oblasts*. Another turning-point came in Bosanska Krajina in July 1943, when the Oblast Committee of the KPJ finally abolished the institution of the village headman in all areas under its jurisdiction in the belief that individual headmen were collaborating with the enemy.<sup>22</sup> In this way the old order in the villages under Partisan control was in principle abolished and the NOO left as the sole authority.

Eventually, such councils were established at the pan-Bosnian and pan-Yugoslav levels. In November 1942, the first session of AVNOJ as a representative and legislative body for the whole of Yugoslavia was held. This took place in the predominantly Muslim town of Bihać in the solidly Muslim territory of Cazinska

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Krajina. Bihać had been liberated by the Bosnian Partisans themselves, at the suggestion of Šefket Maglajlić, secretary of the Okrug Committee for Podgrmeč and a Muslim, and of the members of the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Detachment. Their recommendation was based on the existence in the town of a well-organised KPJ organisation and a group of NOP sympathisers among the Home Guards. During the autumn of 1942, Bihać's KPJ organisation had acquired detailed military information about the town's defences from its contacts among the latter's Home Guards, which it forwarded to the Partisans.<sup>23</sup> The importance of this information in persuading the Partisans to attack the town was such that Kosta Nađ, Commander of the Operational Staff of Bosanska Krajina, said after the war: 'The idea for the liberation of Bihać stemmed from the town itself'.<sup>24</sup>

Delegates for the First Session of AVNOJ were selected by the respective provincial Partisan leaderships to represent each land: seventeen from Bosnia-Herzegovina, fifteen from Croatia, fourteen from Serbia, fourteen from Montenegro, eight from Slovenia, six from the Sanjak and three from Vojvodina. Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the Partisan heartland, had the largest number of delegates. In the event, the Slovenian and Vojvodinian delegates and twelve of the others were unable to attend and Macedonia was wholly unrepresented. AVNOJ elected a Presidency and Executive Council. The Presidency consisted of Ivan Ribar, a Croat from Croatia, as president, and two vice-presidents: Pavle Savić and Nurija Pozderac. The first of these was a Serb from Serbia, the second a Bosnian Muslim former senator of the JMO. The choice of Pozderac as one of the top three officials of AVNOJ is an indication of the importance Tito assigned to the Muslims in the Partisans.

The session did not formally define the organisation of the future Yugoslav state, but it issued individual appeals to each of the Yugoslav nations, including the Muslims. The appeal to the Muslims stated: 'All of you, Serbs, Croats and Muslims, need a true and brotherly cooperation in order that Bosnia-Herzegovina as a unit in our brotherly union might progress to the satisfaction of all, regardless of religion and party'. The appeal to the Serbs stated: 'All of you stick to your arms, in the great liberation war against the occupiers for a free and brotherly union of Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia'.<sup>25</sup> The Executive Council of AVNOJ floated a 'People's Liberation Loan' on 15 January 1943 to raise money (500,000,000 kuna) for the NOP. The loan was to be subscribed to by the 'individual countries of Yugoslavia (Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Vojvodina)'.<sup>26</sup> Thus the new Yugoslav state was being constructed in a distinctly Bosnian setting and Bosnia-Herzegovina was guaranteed a place in the Yugoslav federation. Though Bosnia-Herzegovina's equality with the other members of the embryonic federation was not explicitly guaranteed, it was nevertheless strongly implied. Yet for this equality definitely to be achieved, the Bosnian NOP would have to mobilise Muslims and Croats as well as Serbs into the Partisans.

At the international level, the Yugoslav Communists were constrained by inter-Allied diplomacy and the dictates of Moscow. Stalin did not want to offend the Western Allies by appearing to sanction revolutionary activity in Axis-occupied Europe, and so far as the Western Allies were concerned, the Yugoslav monarchy and government-in-exile were the legitimate rulers of Yugoslavia. Consequently, under pressure from the Comintern, Tito in the autumn of 1942 had appended

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the word 'Antifascist' to the name of his planned 'Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia' to emphasise the provisional character of the body and its orientation towards anti-Axis resistance rather than revolution.<sup>27</sup>

### *The origins of Muslim and Croat resistance*

The Axis-Ustasha order oppressed all of Bosnia's nationalities, but to different degrees. This determined the pace and extent to which members of each nationality joined the resistance. Serbs, as well as smaller nationalities such as Jews and Slovenes, were victims of genocide or forced expulsion, and were therefore the first to join the resistance *en masse*. Muslims were victims of Ustasha forced assimilation and bore the brunt of the Serb backlash against the regime; Muslim discontent quickly became widespread, eventually resulting in mass popular Muslim resistance. The Bosnian Croats suffered the suppression of their political party, the HSS, but the fact that their national aspirations were satisfied by Bosnia's union with Croatia dampened the readiness of most of them to support the resistance. Nevertheless, a sizeable number of them eventually did so. The resistance of Muslims and Croats in Bosnia to the Axis-Ustasha order decisively influenced the outcome of the civil war in Yugoslavia. Yet the factors that induced tens of thousands of Croats and Muslims to participate in the NOP and join the Partisans were somewhat different from those motivating the Serbs.

The historian is faced with a conceptual dilemma in writing about the resistance among Muslims and Croats, for whereas, in one sense, the Muslim and Croat experiences were closely linked to each other and to that of the Serbs, in another sense each was specific. In the cities and towns of the NDH both Muslims and Croats suffered increasingly under the repression of the Ustasas and occupiers, whose police arrested members of both communities as well as Serbs and others, treating them alike as enemies of the state. Thus, at one level, it would be more accurate to speak of a 'Bosnian resistance' than solely of a 'Muslim' or a 'Croat' one. Indeed the historian is to some extent forced to treat Muslims and Croats as a single category by the fact that Ustasha documents use the word 'Croat' to refer to both Croats and Muslims. However, at another level the experiences of the two communities diverged to the point where they must be treated as separate phenomena.

The great majority of the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina reacted with reserve to the establishment of the NDH. Relatively powerless and with no state of their own, politically conscious Muslims bided their time while waiting for the outcome of the war to become clearer. Their sympathies were generally neither with the Axis nor the Allies; those Muslims who sought guidance from abroad tended to look to Turkey, the former imperial matrix and now studiously neutral.<sup>28</sup> Muslim opinion steadily turned against the Ustasha regime during the first two and a half years of the war, culminating in widespread rebellion by the autumn of 1943. Muslim resistance took a number of different forms, ranging from entry into the Chetniks, through autonomist agitation on an anti-Ustasha but pro-German basis, to entry into the Partisans. But all currents of the anti-Ustasha Muslim opposition were united in a shared goal: a Bosnia-Herzegovina enjoying some form of autonomy, in which Muslim individuality would be pro-



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tected. The different Muslim currents did not, therefore, tend to view each other as real enemies, but rather as fellow travellers who had simply chosen different strategies to achieve national liberation.

The Bosnian Croat experience of these years was somewhat different. Among the Croat nation, it was the Dalmatians—the best part of whose homeland had been annexed by Italy—who spearheaded resistance to the Axis order. They were followed by a section of Croats from Croatia proper, above all those of a traditionally left-wing or Yugoslav orientation, who joined what was referred to in the NOP as the People's Liberation Struggle of Croatia in order to fight for a Croatian state within a Yugoslav framework. The Bosnian Croats, however, were the section of the Croat nation least willing to join the NOP. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was members of the Catholic community who held the dominant role in the quisling state, while the Muslims were most exposed to the consequences of their misrule. At the same time, there was no Bosnian Croat autonomist opposition to the Usthas, nor did Bosnian Croats ever join the Partisans *en masse*, except in a couple of areas (above all the Livno and Tuzla regions). Insofar as there was a Bosnian Croat resistance to the NDH, it was above all an appendage of the much stronger resistance of the Croats of Dalmatia and of Croatia proper.

The Muslims of East Bosnia were from the first months of the civil war particularly exposed to the danger represented by the Chetniks. The weakness of the Home Guard and Ustasha forces in this part of Bosnia, the close proximity of quisling Serbia, and the massacres carried out by the Serb rebels during late 1941 and early 1942 made it apparent to the East Bosnian Muslims that their very survival was hanging in the balance and that they could expect no dependable protection from the Axis and the NDH. In Tuzla, the Muslim inhabitants were living in such fear of the Chetniks by the spring of 1942 that they were said to be ready to appeal over the heads of the Ustasha authorities for direct German military protection, according to a report of the Ustasha secret police, the Ustasha Surveillance Service (*Ustaška Nadzorna Služba* [UNS]).<sup>29</sup>

The Italian reoccupation of September 1941 brought home to many Muslims and Croats for the first time the realisation that they were as much a people under occupation as the Serbs. Italian troops requisitioned the corn of Muslim peasants, tore the veils off Muslim women, raped them and killed livestock for sport.<sup>30</sup> Italian collaboration with the Chetniks then increasingly generated Muslim discontent. The commander of the NDH's 4<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment reported in October 1941 how the Italians in Herzegovina mobilised the Serb population against the Muslims:

our people—the Muslim Croats—are exposed to the trickery and harassment of the Greek-Easterners [i.e. the Serbs] whom the Italian military authorities are treating as unquestionable and proven factors, on the basis of which our people are imprisoned. On account of such tricks, many Muslim Croats lie in the prisons of the Italian authorities.

Many Muslims were 'worried by such behaviour on the part of the Italians', he concluded.<sup>31</sup> In January 1942, the Command of the Croatian Navy complained that:

the Italian authorities arrest, imprison and punish our people without consulting our authorities and without our knowledge, as if they were operating on their own territory

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and not in Croatia. This is creating an extremely unfavourable impression on the Croats... our people are losing confidence in our State when they see that the Italians can do what they want.<sup>32</sup>

General Glaise von Horstenau, German military attaché in Zagreb, noted in February 1942: 'On the Adriatic coast it has reached the stage where the Croats are eagerly awaiting the arrival of English troops as bringing liberation, for they do not believe that we will bring them that liberation.' Glaise believed that in the event of a British invasion the Croats would rise against the Germans to reclaim Dalmatia.<sup>33</sup> Even Bosnian Croat Ustashes were shocked at the Ustasha regime's surrender of Dalmatian territory to the Italians; when Pavelić visited Banja Luka in May 1942, he was jeered by members of the Ustasha Youth with the slogan 'Unhappy is Dalmatia'.<sup>34</sup> The Ustashes' Department of Public Security reported in June 1942 that it was 'the inability of our authorities to establish order, the casualties that are suffered every day, the lack of protection for private and state property, the lack of security for traffic on the roads' that were 'worrying all well-intentioned Croats' and that this 'discontent of the Croats was being increased by the presence of Italian military forces...'. Consequently, 'such conditions are creating a fertile ground for Partisan-Communist propaganda which recently has been spread even by certain Croats, particularly by those who were already inclined to a Communist view of the world'.<sup>35</sup> Yet the Italians appeared blithely unconcerned at the effect their policies were having on Croat and Muslim support for their order: in the spring of 1942, for example, they went so far as to distribute a Serb-nationalist newspaper, *Slobodna Srbija* ('Free Serbia'), in parts of their zone of control in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the Italians tolerated Chetnik and even Partisan attacks on Croat and Muslim civilians. The UNS reported in December 1942: 'The allied Italian army has recently been taking no measures whatsoever to improve public security and guarantee the people a peaceful life; they are particularly passive about offering support and protection to the Catholic population.'<sup>37</sup>

Muslim opposition to the Ustashes was spurred above all by the Ustashes' anti-Serb campaign, something that provoked a massive anti-Muslim backlash among the Bosnian Serbs and threatened to engulf the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina in flames. The Ustashes were unwilling to admit either the scale of the rebellion or their inability to suppress it: 'Not a single town or larger settlement has been burned or in any other way destroyed; very occasionally an occasional house has been burned', an Ustasha proclamation of February 1942 assured the population of Sarajevo; 'Stories of tens of thousands of killed Muslims are simple lies. The truth is that the number in East Bosnia, excluding those killed in battle, has not even exceeded a thousand'.<sup>38</sup> Such language hardly reassured the Muslims as they watched bedraggled refugees pour into their cities. The Muslims resented further the breakdown of law and order, the behaviour of Italian troops and their collaboration with the Chetniks, the loss of East Bosnian territory to the rebels and the inability or unwillingness of the NDH to protect the Muslims there. They feared also the possibility of their mobilisation for service on the Russian front, or of an Axis attack on Turkey, and above all that the regime would attempt their mass conversion to Catholicism.<sup>39</sup>

Ustasha repression struck the NOP in the towns with increasing severity. This meant the arrest of dozens of young townsmen of all nationalities, something that



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might crush subversive activity temporarily but in the long run only increased popular opposition to the regime. Twenty-five people, including ten Muslims, were arrested in Bosanska Dubica in January 1942.<sup>40</sup> During April 1942, seven Croats and two Muslims were arrested in Vareš for Communist activities and for links with the Partisans.<sup>41</sup> In May 1942, eighty-two citizens of all nationalities, about half of them Muslims, were arrested in Žepče, Zavidovići and Begov Han. Although the Ustasha police believed that 'the guilt of the arrested is beyond all doubt', the overwhelming majority were soon released under the pressure of public 'agitation'.<sup>42</sup> Fifty-two NOP activists were arrested in the Cazin district in July 1942, including three *hodjas* (Muslim clergymen), six Home Guards and two Ustasas.<sup>43</sup> Ustasha repression was partly responsible for the fact that among the Muslims, unlike among the Serbs, it was the townspeople rather than peasants who were easiest to recruit for the NOP. In November 1942, the UNS in the town of Bosanski Novi listed twenty-eight individuals of all nationalities as known Communists.<sup>44</sup> In February 1943, the UNS noted that 'in Brčko, English Communist propaganda is well developed', and listed several prominent townsmen as its exponents.<sup>45</sup>

Popular hostility to the Ustasha regime among Croats and Muslims increased steadily as time went by. The worsening living conditions brought about by the ramshackle Ustasha administration and the civil war rapidly destroyed Muslim faith in the NDH. The Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Home Guard Group reported from Sarajevo in mid-January 1942 that 'the ghost of hunger is pressing upon an ever greater number of villages and towns', that even the most basic necessities were unavailable, and that 'the inability of the authorities to resolve this situation is obvious, and for that reason faith in the state is disappearing'. The Muslims in particular appeared to be 'completely disappointed in all their hopes for the future that had appeared so favourable in the first days of the NDH's foundation'.<sup>46</sup> In February 1942 Glaise von Horstenau reported: 'All the nationalities [in the NDH], with insignificant exceptions, are in unison in their determined opposition to the Ustasha movement... Hatred towards them genuinely could not be greater.' Glaise stressed: 'also rising is the dissatisfaction of the Bosnian Muslims, whose yearning for the old and treasured Bosnian authority from the time of old Austria is becoming ever stronger....'<sup>47</sup> In May, Glaise reported: 'Communism is increasingly spreading also among the Croat people', provoking greater repression on the part of the Ustasas towards the Croats that, in turn, further exacerbated the discontent of the latter.<sup>48</sup> The Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment in Mostar reported in late June 1942: 'Restlessness, disquiet, uncertainty and fear of tomorrow are growing ever greater, precisely among the Croatian [i.e. Croat and Muslim] part of the people. The people has almost entirely lost faith in the state and its power, seeing that it is not capable of safeguarding property or making possible a more peaceful life'.<sup>49</sup> In mid-September, an Ustasha police agent reported: 'The Muslim population is in a great state of terror and is gradually fleeing before the onslaught of the rebels, for it has come to view our forces as impotent and is preparing itself for its fate following the atrocities of the Chetniks in Foča. Throughout East Bosnia and particularly in the Rogatica, Višegrad and Vlasenica districts, a great fear and disquiet have arisen among the Muslims'.<sup>50</sup> The commander of German troops in the NDH estimated in March 1943 that only 2 per

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cent of the NDH's population supported the regime and that the regime's unpopularity made pacification of the rebellion impossible.<sup>51</sup>

Muslim alienation from the Axis order increased faster than that of the Bosnian Croats, for the latter in Bosnia-Herzegovina dominated the Ustasha administration, which they genuinely tended to see as their own. This produced increasingly bad feelings between the two communities. The UNS reported in the spring of 1942 a worsening of relations between ethnic Muslims and Catholic Croats in many parts of the NDH.<sup>52</sup> In areas of the NDH where Croat-Muslim relations were poor, this tension often expressed itself in Muslim sympathy towards the Partisans. The UNS recorded in June 1942 that in Banja Luka, while 'the Catholics in the villages and in the towns increasingly see the need for the survival of their state', so far as the Muslims were concerned, 'the city population of Banja Luka, particularly of Gornji Šehar, is wholly behind the Communists and openly display their sympathy towards them'.<sup>53</sup> A Central Committee operative reported from the Livno region in February 1943 that 'in this sector, controlled by this unit, 70 per cent of the population is Muslim and 30 per cent Croat. The Muslims are in their great majority friendly towards the Partisans while the Croats are in their great majority reserved'.<sup>54</sup> In parts of Central Bosnia where the Serb element was small, the violence of the Ustasha movement turned against the Muslims. The Ustasas murdered two Muslims near Donji Vakuf in September 1942, two more at Gornji Vakuf in October and three more in the Prozor district and one in Gornji Vakuf in November.<sup>55</sup> The Italians, for their part, may have attempted to play off Muslims against Croats, much as they attempted to play off Serbs against non-Serbs. According to one UNS report: 'So far as is known, the Italians are encouraging the Muslims to seek independence for Bosnia under the Italian umbrella'.<sup>56</sup>

In the spring of 1942, the Ustasha regime, under pressure from the Germans and Italians to moderate its anti-Serb policies to defuse Serb resistance and isolate the Communists, concluded a series of agreements with the Bosnian Chetniks, bestowing upon the latter a degree of recognition and protection on the part of the NDH, and requiring both parties to collaborate against the Partisans as the common enemy.<sup>57</sup> These agreements increased Muslim, Croat and Home Guard discontent with the NDH.<sup>58</sup> The Ustasas' Department of Public Security reported in June that:

[the] Croatian Muslims are highly disturbed by the negotiations with the Chetniks. The Partisans have skilfully sown among their ranks the rumour that these negotiations are being made at the expense of the Muslims and that the Roman Catholics and Orthodox—i.e. the Christians—will band together against them. Consequently there are certain cases of vacillation in their ranks and even of entry into the Partisans.<sup>59</sup>

The Ustasha administration in Prnjavor in north-central Bosnia complained in June 1942 that, following the pact with the Chetniks, conditions had 'worsened by 100 per cent' and that the Chetniks were 'seizing clothes and money from the Roman Catholic people and in sum were behaving worse than the Communists, and this following the agreement'. Consequently, 'Croats who still remain in their native region are horrified beyond words that the Chetniks are administering the Croatian State; indeed that Croatia has been surrendered to them'.<sup>60</sup>

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The Chetniks in Bosnia in this period felt a corresponding sense of triumphalism. In July, the Chetniks held a rally in the town of Trebinje in eastern Hercegovina at which they announced publicly that they had cells in every Serb village in the region and were carrying out 'the establishment of a Great Serbia'. They claimed triumphantly that 'East Bosnia today is more ours than it has ever been. The Drina is today less of a border than it has ever been. There are no longer any Croats there, except a few unhappy Muslims in the towns'.<sup>61</sup> The Ustasha authorities in Stolac, meanwhile, reported in June that following Chetnik acts of plunder, sanctioned by the Italians, local Croat peasants were heard to ask 'who is in control here and who is boss in these parts, is it the Italians, Chetniks or Croats...?'<sup>62</sup> As one Ustasha official reported despairingly from Mostar a few months later: 'Our government here today does not exist. It is wholly powerless and as such completely useless'.<sup>63</sup> Petar Baćović, commander of the Chetnik Operational Units in eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina, reported in September 1942:

I have these days completed a tour of all the units in Hercegovina and I can report to you with great joy that the morale of the population is more than excellent. The desolation caused by the Ustashes and particularly by the Partisans has created among the people grounds for new activity, which today finds expression in the Chetnik organisation.

The Chetniks were at the same time crowning their victory with further genocidal actions: 'Eight days ago we seized Foča from the Ustashes. On that occasion 1,200 Ustashes in uniform and about 1,000 compromised Muslims perished, while we suffered only four dead and five wounded'. Baćović made clear that his forces were engaged in a systematic effort to exterminate or expel the Muslim and Croat population of Hercegovina:

I should add, in reference to our retributive expeditions in Ljubuški and Imotski, that our Chetniks—greatly embittered by the misdeeds committed by the Ustashes against the Serbs—skinned alive three Catholic priests between Ljubinje and Vrgorac. Our Chetniks have killed all men aged fifteen years or above. They did not kill women or children aged under fifteen years. Seventeen villages were entirely burned... We shall soon, God willing, attack Fazlagić Kula, the last Muslim stronghold in Hercegovina. After that in Hercegovina there will not remain a single Muslim in the villages.<sup>64</sup>

Axis and Ustasha repression inflicted on the Muslim and Croat population steadily escalated during 1942 and 1943. In March 1943, the German military authorities arrested twelve suspected Communists in Bosanska Dubica, most of them middle-class Croats and Muslims. Among them were the town's Home Guard commander and the deputy mayor of the municipality; the others included a lawyer, innkeeper, railway official, schoolmaster, painter, baker and teacher's daughter.<sup>65</sup> The Home Guard officer was executed; the UNS reported that 'this event created an unfavourable impression among the Muslims, who see in it proof of the hostility of the Germans towards the Muslims'.<sup>66</sup> In April, the Italians arrested ten suspected Communists in Čapljina, of whom seven were Muslims, causing a Muslim judge and two imams to intervene on behalf of the arrested.<sup>67</sup> In Maglaj in May 1943, the UNS reported that frequent acts of callousness on the part of the occupiers and Ustashes towards the Muslims and Croats also increased the discontent of the latter, as in March 1943 when the Germans bombed the

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predominantly Muslim town of Kladanj; in the same month in Sarajevo when an Ustasha officer executed a Muslim for singing Partisan songs; or in May of the same year, when the Germans attempted to arrest two Ustashes in Zenica to appease the local Chetniks. All these acts were greeted with outrage by the local Muslim and/or Croat population.<sup>68</sup>

### *The KPJ and the Bosnian Muslims*

The Communists sought to tap into the widespread discontent of the Muslim population with Ustasha rule. Seeking to play on popular Muslim identification with Turkey, the Provincial Committee in August 1941 asserted that the 'German plundering horde is already gathering on the borders of Turkey, across which they intend to go to subjugate and plunder the Muslim peoples of the Middle East'.<sup>69</sup> The Staff of the Hercegovinian Detachment issued a proclamation in September 1941 falsely claiming that Turkey, 'that honourable and peaceful nation', had joined the war against Germany.<sup>70</sup> Just as the Communists among the rebels were initially ready to collaborate with Great Serb elements, so in the towns they sought to cooperate with Muslim conservatives. Avdo Humo reported in November 1941 that the anger of the Muslim population in Sarajevo was exploding against the Ustasha regime over the arrest of about a thousand citizens of Sarajevo, among whom were some three hundred Muslims including the sons of the JMO politicians Mehmed Spaho and Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović. Humo recommended a determined campaign by the NOP to win over the Muslims.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, on 7 November Tito issued a proclamation to the Yugoslav peoples that mentioned the Muslims for the first time.<sup>72</sup>

Humo subsequently arranged a meeting with Hadžihasanović in the knowledge that he was the most authoritative Muslim politician opposed to the Ustasha course and the possible focus of a future Muslim rebellion against the NDH. Humo met Hadžihasanović via Zaim Šarac, a Muslim politician of the Independent Democratic Party, whose son Džemil was a Partisan. Zaim would subsequently become Deputy Prime Minister of Bosnia-Hercegovina in the Communist-dominated regime after the war. According to Humo's account, Hadžihasanović expressed sympathy for the Partisan programme of brotherhood and unity and the Partisan defence of Muslim rights, but doubted that the Partisans could attain a leading role in Bosnian politics. Humo's strenuous efforts to recruit Hadžihasanović to the NOP were met with the refrain that, so far as he was concerned, 'let [the Muslim militia] help you, let them not shoot at you, let them give you free movement through their territory, but I am against armed cooperation. Broadly speaking, such cooperation would mean the drowning of the Muslims in a movement in which they would lose their particularity'.<sup>73</sup>

The Communists specifically targeted the Muslims with propaganda filled with references to Bosnian patriotism and the brotherhood and unity of the Muslims, Serbs and Croats. The Provincial Committee issued an appeal to the Muslim population in December 1941 that denounced the Ustashes for having 'slaughtered and killed, burned and raped the length of our martyred Bosnia-Hercegovina'. It presented the NDH as the worst in a long line of oppressors of Bosnia-Hercegovina: 'Bosnia has been under dahis and villains who burned and

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roasted in the name of Constantinople, in the name of Vienna and in the name of Belgrade, but they have all been exceeded by the monsters in human form who have committed [infamous crimes] against the Serbs in the name of Zagreb'. It claimed that the struggle of the working people of Bosnia-Herzegovina alone could 'guarantee our Bosnia a better and happier future in the great community of liberated nations of the Balkans and Europe'. It spoke of a struggle of 'Serbs, Muslims and Croats' that could 'attain freedom for tormented Bosnia-Herzegovina and guarantee her a happier future'. It did not mention Yugoslavia.<sup>74</sup> The Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Detachment appealed to the Muslims of Bosanska Krajina by claiming (not entirely truthfully) that 'the entire Islamic and Arab world is on the side of the Soviet Union, England and America. The Turkish nation is also following the successes of the struggle of Russia with which the late Kemal amicably collaborated'.<sup>75</sup> The Partisans of Bijeljina appealed to the Muslim masses on the basis of class hostility to the *begs*,<sup>76</sup> propaganda of this kind represented the exception rather than the rule and can only have been poorly received by most Muslims. A Partisan proclamation to the 'Muslims of East Bosnia' of about 25 January 1942 claimed that the 'Partisans are fighting to liberate and pacify our shared homeland Bosnia-Herzegovina, to guarantee it a happier future'.<sup>77</sup>

The Communists spread their message of brotherhood and unity in public rallies convened in the territory they held. The staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment reported on 1 January 1942 that it had in the previous month organised rallies at Slabinja, Marini, Grbavci, Gornji Podgradci, Turjak and many other villages where the local population was introduced to the Partisan political programme. As a result, 'There is developing in particular among the Partisans both comradeship and understanding for the politics of brotherhood between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina.' This was, the staff claimed, demonstrated during the Detachment's capture of Orahovo, when the Partisans distributed goods captured from the Home Guard and gendarmes to the local Muslims while the latter welcomed the Partisans with cakes and coffee. Twenty beehives of honey belonging to the gendarmes were distributed to the Muslim children for Bajram. The Partisan deputy political commissar, himself a Muslim, delivered a speech to the local Muslims informing them of the goals of the NOP and of the meaning of the brotherhood of Serbs, Croats and Muslims.<sup>78</sup>

The Chetnik persecution of Muslims did not cause them to flock spontaneously to the Partisans in the way that the Bosnian Serbs had flocked to them in response to Ustasha persecution. This was because the Muslims, unlike the Bosnian Serbs, had possessed a national political leadership of their own from before the war that continued to hold their political loyalty and that the Communists could not easily displace. Furthermore, the Partisans' assumption of the leadership of Serb resistance to the Ustasas had earned them the image of a primarily Serb movement, an image strengthened by their involvement in atrocities against Muslims at the start of the uprising, and they would have to work hard to change it. Rather, the Muslims came round to the Partisan cause more gradually and consciously than the Bosnian Serbs, as the reality of their political choice became starker and as Partisan propaganda concerning Bosnian self-determination slowly diffused through the population.

KPJ appeals to the Muslims therefore had only limited success in 1941–42. On 3 June 1942, the Partisans of the 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina Detachment attacked Glamoč and

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attempted to appeal to the town's Muslim defenders enrolled in the Home Guard; but 'the Muslims cursed our mothers and the like'.<sup>79</sup> The Communists were aware that in Bosnia the Muslims were more receptive to the NOP than were the Croats. Vukmanović-Tempo reported on 10 April 1942 that in East Bosnia 'The Muslim population is sympathetic to our struggle while the Catholics are aloof'.<sup>80</sup> The Hercegovinian Operational Staff reported on 22 May that whereas the Muslim masses were 'ever more ready to accept us, to join us', Croat sympathy for the Partisans was 'much weaker than among the Muslims'.<sup>81</sup> On occasion the Communists attempted to play on this division, such as in August 1942 when the Supreme Staff planned to seize the town of Kupres through inducing the Muslim troops of its garrison to surrender, hoping to 'split the Muslim Ustasas from the Ustasha Catholics'. According to Tito's order, the defecting Muslims were to identify themselves to the Partisans with the cry of 'Allah is with us', whereupon the Partisans were to reply 'Allah is great'. Tito believed that 'the separation of the Muslim Ustasas from the Ustasha Catholics will be of great military and political significance'.<sup>82</sup> The operation was nevertheless an outright failure.<sup>83</sup>

By the start of 1943, although the Muslims were generally not ready to join the Partisans *en masse*, they frequently looked upon the latter with feelings ranging from ambivalence to outright sympathy. In Central Bosnia, where the Ustasas had signed alliances with the Chetniks, the political department of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian Brigade reported in January 1943 that while 'the Serbs are Chetnik-oriented' and 'the Croats behave towards us as enemies', by contrast:

the Muslims are quickly coming round and putting themselves in the service of our movement; although one could say that they have no political philosophy, their sympathies are with our side (particularly in the towns). They do not believe in the future of the NDH; they are conscious of the danger from the Chetniks; they are convinced of the justice of our struggle; but they vacillate, fearing the return of the Ustasas.<sup>84</sup>

By the start of 1943, the Communists had not yet achieved mass entry of Muslims into the Partisans, but they had laid the basis for this development, which would be accomplished in the autumn of 1943.

### *The KPJ and the Bosnian Croats*

The situation of the Bosnian Croats was somewhat different from that of the Muslims. The Ustasas' emphasis on the importance of Bosnia to the Croat nation contrasted, so far as most politically conscious Bosnian Croats were concerned, very favourably with the callousness and disregard with which the HSS had treated the community. The Bosnian Croats—unlike the Croats in Croatia proper and particularly in Dalmatia—therefore continued generally to support the NDH throughout the war. The KPJ's project of a multinational Bosnian entity nevertheless required Bosnian Croat participation in the NOP. The Communists were forced to compete with the Ustasas for the hearts and minds of the Bosnian Croats by appealing to and organising the latter on a Croatian national basis. As the war progressed and the Ustasha regime's relations with the Muslims worsened, it came to rely ever more exclusively on the Catholic population of Bosnia-Hercegovina to staff its bureaucracy and army in the country. This made it particularly important for the KPJ to counteract Ustasha influence over the Bosnian Croats.

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From the early months of the uprising, Croats were much better represented in the Bosnian Partisan leadership than in the rank and file. The Romanija Detachment had as its commander Slaviša Vajner-Čiča, the Majevisa Detachment Ivan Marković-Irac, the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Shock Brigade Ivica Marušić-Ratko and the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division Josip Mažar-Šoša; all four commanders were Croats while their units were predominantly Serb. Mažar-Šoša was deemed by Kosta Nađ to be the most capable Partisan commander in Bosanska Krajina.<sup>85</sup> In November 1942 the commander of the newly formed 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corp was Nađ, a Croat, although the corps had an overwhelming Serb majority. Yet these represented only a small portion of the Bosnian Croat population. Consequently, in its efforts to mobilise the Bosnian Croats, the Bosnian KPJ drew upon the assistance of the KPH and the Croatian Partisans. Hence the mobilisation of the Bosnian Croats in the NOP was—unlike the case with the Bosnian Serbs—part and parcel of the mobilisation of their matrix country's population. It is therefore necessary to take a step back from the Bosnian scene and to view the wider Yugoslav picture. There were three aspects to this: the use of Croatian patriotic rhetoric in Partisan proclamations to the Bosnian Croats; the use of Croat-majority Partisan units from Croatia in operations in Bosnian Croat localities; and the subordination of certain Croat-inhabited areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the Croatian Partisan command and to the KPH.

The KPJ and particularly the Croatian Communists claimed from the start to support Croatian independence. As early as April 1941, while Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were still allies, the Central Committee of the KPH issued a proclamation to the Croatian people, denouncing the Ustasas and ending with the slogans 'Forward in the struggle for the independence and unification of the entire Croatian nation!'; 'Long live the brotherhood and unity of the Croats and Serbs in Croatia!'; 'Long live the brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia in the struggle for national independence!'—in that order.<sup>86</sup> Following the Axis attack on the USSR, the Central Committee of the KPH issued another proclamation, one that wholly avoided use of the words 'Yugoslav' or 'Yugoslavia'. Its slogans were 'Long live the solidarity of the Croatian nation with the attacked nations of the Soviet Union!' and 'Long live the struggle of the Croatian nation for national and social liberation!'<sup>87</sup> This Croatian patriotic rhetoric, like its Bosnian counterpart, remained constant throughout the war. The Central Committee of the KPH appealed to local bodies of the HSS on 5 September to 'remember your brilliant tradition, the brilliant tradition of the Croats, the shadow of the great Matija Gubec, the Radić brothers, the struggle of many other fighters and martyrs for the freedom of the Croatian nation and go bravely into battle, the battle for the liberation of the Croatian nation and all the nations of Yugoslavia'. It ended with 'Long live the unity of the Croatian nation in the struggle against fascism!' and 'Long live the fraternal alliance of the nations of Yugoslavia in the struggle for freedom!'<sup>88</sup> The appeal to the tradition of the sixteenth-century peasant rebel Matija Gubec, one that the Communists made frequently, was also one that the Ustasas attempted—the Ustasas in Banja Luka held a memorial service 'for the great Croats Matija Gubec, Stipe Javor and Ante Starčević' on 28 February 1942.<sup>89</sup> In this way, the Communists and the Ustasas competed in their appeals to the same Croat-patriotic heritage.



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The Bosnian Partisans followed the lead of their Croatian comrades and targeted the Bosnian Croats with Croatian patriotic propaganda. In late September, the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina issued an appeal to the 'Men and Women Workers, Officers, Soldiers and Citizens' of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which denounced the 'traitor Pavelić' for 'selling our country to the foreigners bit by bit. Croatian Međimurje has been sold to the Hungarians, Croatian Dalmatia to the Italians, and here today Italian troops are occupying Herzegovina'.<sup>90</sup> The Partisans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Company of Bosanska Krajina appealed to the Croat villagers of Central Bosnia in November 1941 by denouncing Hitler for stating that 'the Slavs are trash'. They denied the right of Pavelić to speak in the name of 'the late Stjepan Radić and the late Starčević' on the grounds that neither Radić nor Starčević would have approved of the Ustasha crimes and they claimed to be fighting for a 'state that will not be only Serb or only Croat or only Muslim... a state in which every honourable Croat, Serb and Muslim will have equal rights'. Yugoslavia was not mentioned except as the 'former Yugoslavia'.<sup>91</sup>

The capture of towns by the Partisans, generally followed by their rapid withdrawal in the face of an enemy counter-attack, served the purpose not only of destabilising the NDH but of providing the occasion for the Partisans to hold rallies to put forward their political message to the town's population. At a Partisan rally at liberated Bastaši near Drvar in August, according to the Partisan newspaper *Gerilac*, a 'Croat worker' put forward the 'standpoint of the Croat nation—the Croat workers, peasants and national intelligentsia' against the Ustashes, 'who have taken from them Dalmatia and Međimurje, burdened them with an Italian king, who today are stealing their corn and leaving them hungry so that they and the Frankist masters can be content and overfed, who are forcing them to go to the Soviet front and the Bosnian mountains for their criminal bosses' interests'.<sup>92</sup>

The Communists in Croatia, under instructions from the Comintern, worked from the summer of 1941 for an alliance with sections of the HSS against the Ustashes. This was difficult given the refusal of the leadership of the HSS under Vladko Maček to support either side in the Ustasha-Partisan conflict or in the Second World War generally. Consequently, the Croatian Communists moved to establish a parallel, pro-Partisan HSS organisation that could bypass Maček and gather HSS politicians and their supporters across Croatia behind the NOP. The first expression of this policy was a treaty signed between the Croatian Communists and a group claiming to be the 'Croat Peasant Party' in September 1942, according to which

...the Communist Party of Croatia and the Croat Peasant Party, in the aim of uniting their efforts in the struggle for the liberation of Croatia, have conducted negotiations via their delegates that have been completed successfully and resulted in agreement over the most important questions that are of life interest to the Croatian nation. The Communist Party of Croatia and the Croat Peasant Party have reached unanimity over the character of the People's Liberation Struggle, which is being waged not so that this or that party or group should come to power. Rather this is a struggle for a truly independent Croatia from which the occupiers will be expelled and in which the Ustasha criminals who have erred over the interests of the Croat nation and who have spilled innocent blood; will be destroyed for a Croatia in which all Croatian lands would be united; for a free Croatia, a Croatia of the fullest democratic freedom in which the people themselves will determine the form of



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government and in which will be guaranteed the right of the Croatian nation to self-determination; for a happy Croatia, a Croatia of fraternal peoples, a Croatia in which the toiling masses, workers, peasants and employees will be guaranteed all rights and bread, work and rest and the entire nation a free and unhindered cultural development.<sup>93</sup>

The agreement provided for the entry of sections of the HSS into the People's Liberation Front of Croatia, with a right to representation in the leading Croatian and Yugoslav Partisan representative bodies and for the formation of a 'contact council' made up of representatives of both parties and tasked with coordinating their resistance activities. Although this agreement pertained only to the territories under the jurisdiction of the Communist Party of Croatia—that is, Croatia proper including Dalmatia—it promised that the Croatian Communists would request the Central Committee of the KPJ to extend it to other parts of the former Yugoslavia where Croats lived, namely Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vojvodina.<sup>94</sup> In practice, the pro-NOP wing of the HSS was to be wholly subordinate to the Communists and was not permitted to organise freely in the Partisan rear; but the agreement nevertheless suggested an all-Croat national liberation movement that, unlike the Croatian Partisan movement up till then, would not be limited to Dalmatia and Croatia proper but could potentially stretch into all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vojvodina as well.

The Chetniks made frequent reference to the Croatian character of the Partisan movement in their propaganda. One Chetnik pamphlet of the summer of 1942 claimed: 'In the ranks of the Partisans are convicts, vagrants, ne'er-do-wells and Ustashas, who want to establish on Serb lands a Communist Croatia in place of the Ustasha Croatia. The leading officers of the Partisans are Croats whose goal is the total destruction of the Serb nation'. The pamphlet ended with the slogan 'Death to the Partisans—Freedom to the Serb nation!', in mimicry of the Partisan slogan 'Death to Fascism—Freedom to the People!'<sup>95</sup> The Chetniks of south-west Bosnia issued a proclamation in the autumn of 1942, claiming that the Serbs had 'seen too late the intentions of the Ustasha-Partisan horde; too late they have seen that they want to destroy everything that speaks or writes Serbian and to create a new Croatian Communist republic'.<sup>96</sup> These Chetnik accusations of Communist intentions contained a grain of truth, insofar as the Communists did intend to create a Croatian republic under their own regime. The strategy was a successful one: Croatia could only be conquered through the Croats and insofar as Bosnia-Herzegovina was occupied by a large 'Croatian Army' (meaning the Home Guard), the Croatian People's Liberation Struggle had to extend into Bosnia-Herzegovina too. The Communists' waging of this struggle was to hand them victory; the Chetniks, with their Serb peasant bands confined to rural strongholds, could not in the long run compete.

The first major KPJ success in mobilising Bosnian Croats into the NOP occurred at the town of Livno and its vicinity in south-west Bosnia-Herzegovina in the second-half of 1942. For ethnic, geographic, economic and cultural reasons, despite being part of Bosnia the Livno region was under the jurisdiction of the KPH from before the war until its end, so that the resistance in the Livno region was effectively part of the Croatian rather than the Bosnian NOP. This paid dividends: following the first Partisan liberation of Livno on 5–7 August 1942, members of the Dalmatian and Livno KPH leaderships entered the town and

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summoned a conference of members of the HSS from Livno and the surrounding villages in an effort to recruit them to the NOP. When the Partisans withdrew from Livno in October about 1,500 Livno citizens, including sympathetic members of the HSS, fled with them. Among those who withdrew with the Partisans was Florijan Sučić, former president of the Livno HSS town organisation, who assumed the role of head of the refugee column. He was subsequently made a delegate at AVNOJ representing Croatia rather than Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ivan Pelivan, former president of the Livno HSS district organisation, also joined the NOP in this period. The recruitment of the region's two most prominent HSS politicians, Sučić and Pelivan, helped win the Partisans the sympathy of the local Croat population.

The Partisans liberated Livno again on 15 December, bringing Sučić back. There he presided over a mass rally of citizens and Partisans. The Dalmatian Communists also organised a conference in Livno of HSS supporters from the wider region in order to inform them of the goals of the NOP. On the basis of negotiations with sympathetic HSS members, the Dalmatian and Livno KPH leaderships established a Town NOO comprising four members of the KPJ, three of the HSS and two Muslim representatives. The Councillors toured the villages of the locality to agitate on behalf of the NOP. On 15 January 1943 a District NOO was elected, a body which bore the Croatian term for district (*kotarski*), rather than the Bosnian one *sreski*. Sučić was made president and Ismet Latifić, a Muslim, was made secretary. In this way the Croatian Communists, with the help of the HSS, struck the first blow in rectifying, slightly but significantly, the deficit of Bosnian Croat support for the NOP.<sup>97</sup>

### *The Muslim autonomist opposition*

The KPJ formed only one centre of gravity in the embryonic resistance to the NDH in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A second consisted of elements in the Muslim elite that reacted with reservation to the establishment of the NDH from the start. In their political agitation they resembled the Communists, insofar as they too called for Bosnian autonomy. But in another sense the Muslim autonomists and the NOP overlapped at right angles, for the first were a nationally homogeneous group containing a variety of ideological factions, while the second was an ideologically defined multinational movement; both groups had vague boundaries, with many 'progressive' Muslims belonging to both. A left-wing Muslim shared a commitment to Bosnian autonomy both with the Communists—Serbs, Croats and Jews as well as Muslims—and with his right-wing Muslim counterparts. To a greater extent than either Serbs or Croats, politically conscious Muslims failed to split cleanly into ideologically pro- and anti-fascist camps and were unwilling to fight other Muslims. This has led Professor Šaćir Filandra to comment provocatively: 'The Bosniaks did not participate in World War II'.<sup>98</sup>

Political divisions among the Muslim elite were not essentially ideological but were rather between conflicting strategies of how best to safeguard its position and the Muslim population as a whole in the face of two threats: the assimilationism and hegemonism of the Croat Ustasas and the genocide of the Serb

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Chetniks. The two threats were in fact two sides of the same coin. The brutality of the Ustashes fuelled the Serb rebellion whose brunt was borne by the Muslims. Conversely, the Serb rebellion and the Italian reoccupation of the Italian zone of the NDH in September 1941 further weakened the ramshackle Ustasha puppet-state, whose administration became more onerous and repressive for the Muslims. It was the Muslims who, in the three-sided contest between Partisans, Chetniks and Ustashes, ultimately held the casting vote. Thus the story of the Muslim autonomists—left and right—is part of the story of the revolution in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, one that was of crucial importance for determining its outcome.

Whereas the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina prior to the invasion of 1941 were politically fragmented but relatively homogeneous in terms of class, the Muslims were politically homogeneous but socially stratified. Much more than the Bosnian Serb masses, the Muslim masses followed the lead in politics of their own national elite. There was no spontaneous grass-roots mass uprising on the part of the Muslim masses; they could be drawn into the resistance to the Axis and Ustashes only on the initiative of local Muslim notables. Their resistance, and the form it took, must be understood against the backdrop of Muslim politics in interwar Yugoslavia. The JMO, as the party enjoying the overwhelming support of the Muslim population, both the elite and the masses, had supported Bosnian autonomy, but in 1935 had abandoned this goal as the price of an alliance with the Yugoslav regime of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović. This led to the secession from the JMO of a dissident, pro-Croat faction that rejected the alliance with Stojadinović: this faction constituted itself as the 'Muslim Branch of the Croat Peasant Party' and remained in opposition to Belgrade. When the Stojadinović government fell in 1939, the JMO reaped the whirlwind of its alliance with him: the new Yugoslav government controlled by the regent, Prince Pavle, reached an agreement with the Croatian opposition represented by the HSS, in which Bosnia-Herzegovina was partitioned, effectively between Serbia and Croatia. This was resisted by the Muslim elite through the peaceful campaign for Bosnian autonomy in the period 1939–41. The dissident Muslims of the Muslim Branch remained outside this campaign, owing to their alliance with the HSS. However, when the Ustashes took power in 1941, they co-opted the Muslim Branch, whose leading members—Mešić, Hadžić and Šuljak—became the leading Muslim Ustashes. This in turn resulted in the marginalisation, under the new regime, of their opponents in the JMO, laying the basis for the latter's opposition to it.

In the first weeks of the NDH's existence, a group of Bosnian Muslim, Serb and Croat politicians, who were anti-Ustasha but nevertheless ready to collaborate with the occupiers, delivered a memorandum to the German military government contesting the validity of the inclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the NDH and demanding a direct German military administration over the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The initiative for this came from Hadžihasanović. The other signatories were the Muslims Husein Kadić and Asim Šeremet, the Serbs Milan Božić, Vojislav Besarović, Dušan Jeftanović and Milan Jojić and the Croats Luka Čabrijčić and possibly Vjekoslav Jelavić. Members of this group then visited Hadžić to demand that Bosnia-Herzegovina be granted autonomy. This effort at cross-confessional collaboration by members of the Bosnian elites against the Ustasha geno-

cide ended abruptly when the Ustashas responded by arresting Božić, Besarović and Jeftanović, all of whom were later executed, while the Muslims were strongly warned to desist from such activities.<sup>99</sup>

Hadžihasanović, as the *de facto* leader of the pro-German but anti-Ustasha wing of the Muslim elite, thereupon ceased lobbying the Ustashas directly and adopted a back-seat role in channelling Muslim autonomist opposition to the NDH. He and Dr Kulenović summoned leading members of the former JMO to a meeting at a private residence in the north-Bosnian town of Doboj, some time in the summer of 1941, to adopt a new Muslim strategy. With Hadžihasanović's support, and despite the opposition of a majority of those present, Kulenović resolved to enter the NDH government in order to act as a counterweight to Hadžić and the Muslim Branch, whose tampering with the institution of the Islamic Religious Community had been causing concern. Kulenović's entry into the government was furthermore urged by two Bosnian Serb politicians, Savo Besarović and Dušan Kecmanović, who hoped thereby to improve the position of the Serbs in the NDH. On 14 August a delegation of Muslim notables led by Kulenović and Hadžihasanović was received by Pavelić and delivered to him a declaration of Muslim loyalty to the NDH, after which Kulenović replaced his brother Osman as vice-president of the government in November. The pro-NDH wing of the Muslim elite would henceforth be divided into two hostile camps: the collaborationist wing of the former JMO and the genuine ideological Ustashas who had emerged from the Muslim Branch.<sup>100</sup>

Within the ranks of the Muslim elite, a particular centre of opposition to the Ustasha regime was provided by the cultural society Gajret, which had been traditionally pro-Serb and monarchist until the Cvetković-Maček Sporazum of August 1939. At that point Belgrade's partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina had discredited the pro-Serb course among Muslims, prompting many leading members of Gajret to declare for Bosnian autonomy. When the Ustashas came to power in 1941 the society was forcibly dissolved and its property confiscated, while its members were persecuted for their pro-Serb tradition, making them natural material for the NOP. Some prominent Gajret members, such as Ismet Popovac and Mustafa Pašić, fought for the Muslim cause in the ranks of the Chetniks and others such as Murat-beg Pašić did so in the ranks of the Ustashas; but a very important group would eventually do so through collaboration with the NOP, and would provide the latter's most important non-Communist Muslims: Muhamed Sudžuka, Zaim Šarac, Husein Brkić, Hamdija Čemerlić, Murat-beg Zaimović and others. Furthermore, the Ustasha regime's discrimination against members of the Muslim elite who had formerly been Serb-oriented not only alienated them, but provoked the opposition of Muslims in general.<sup>101</sup>

Muslim autonomist opposition to the Ustashas manifested itself in a series of resolutions issued in September-December 1941 by representatives of the Muslim elite in the principal Bosnian towns, addressed to the German and NDH authorities and condemning the persecution of the Serbs. These resolutions were couched, like those of the KPJ, in Bosnian-patriotic terms. The event heralding these resolutions occurred on 14 August, while Pavelić was receiving Kulenović's delegation. On that date the assembly in Sarajevo of El-Hidaje, an organisation set up by members of the *ulema* in 1936 with the aim of preserving the authority of

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Islamic law and institutions over the Bosnian Muslims,<sup>102</sup> 'expressed its concern for the disturbances that had come about and the deaths caused by these disturbances, and in the name of all Muslims condemned and disassociated itself from those Muslims who had participated in acts of violence'.<sup>103</sup> This was followed by resolutions issued by assemblies of Muslim notables in Prijedor (23 September), Sarajevo (12 October), Mostar (21 October), Banja Luka (12 November), Bijeljina (2 December) and Tuzla (11 December). The resolutions, with varying degrees of forthrightness, rebuked or condemned the Ustasha, both for their mistreatment of Muslims and for their attempts to turn Muslims and Serbs against one another. The sentiments they expressed combined Bosnian patriotism with opposition to the disruption of inter-communal relations by the Ustasha and to the marginalisation of the Muslims in the NDH administration. Together, they summarise the principal Muslim grievances against the new order.

The Prijedor Resolution was issued by the District Commission for Vakiĥs and Schools in Prijedor, as the representative body of the Prijedor Muslims. It accused rogue Ustasha elements of 'killing peaceful sections of the citizenry of the Greek Eastern religion', while 'wearing the fez to create the false impression that all this evil is being committed by the Muslims', as well as 'with guns pointed, forcing Muslims to kill with axes citizens of the Greek Eastern religion', in order to turn the Serbs against the Muslims. This was linked to the complaint that all organs of authority in the district 'lie in the hands of Catholics'. Since 'in the local authorities there is no Muslim holding a single prominent position, those authorities can lead a purely Catholic policy'. Conversely, 'since the foundation of the Independent State of Croatia not a single local Muslim is in any kind of service; even though, after the expulsion of the Serbs, there are enough places, the *tabornik* in this [Ustasha] Camp has stated that Muslims cannot be trusted to responsible service because they do not enjoy confidence...'.<sup>104</sup>

The Sarajevo Resolution was signed by the Muslim organisations El Hidaje and Narodna Uzdanica, the craft association Hurijet, the Muslim philanthropic society Merhamet, the Muslim societies El Kamer and Bratsvo and the Association of Former Landlords. It noted: 'The Muslims during their past history in Turkish times, when they were the only rulers, tolerated all religions without distinction and did not impose tyranny upon anybody. Therefore Muslims today cannot be the initiators of crimes or be those who cannot tolerate Greek-Easterners or who provoke all disorder, as some have deliberately done'. It complained: 'In these difficult circumstances, intolerance towards Islam is being manifested by some Catholics. This is occurring in writing, in private and public speeches and in unequal treatment of the Catholic and Islamic religions'. It demanded: 'real security of life, honour, property and religion for all citizens of the state without any discrimination whatever'; that 'all true culprits, regardless of religion, be called to account in court and be most strictly punished according to law, as well as those who ordered such evil deeds'; and that 'all religious intolerance be prevented, and those who in this regard have created any kind of disturbance be most strictly punished'.<sup>105</sup> In response to this resolution, a delegation of Sarajevo Serbs visited one of its authors, Asim Musakadić, and expressed its gratitude.<sup>106</sup> Both the Prijedor and Sarajevo resolutions were circulated by the Partisans in their efforts to spread the Muslim resistance to the regime.<sup>107</sup>

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The Mostar Resolution lamented: 'Throughout the entire history of our beloved homeland Bosnia-Herzegovina, no such difficult and turbulent days, nor such a fateful time as we are now enduring, can be remembered'. It claimed to represent 'the will and feelings of the broadest Muslim layers across our proud Bosnia-Herzegovina', in stating that 'countless crimes, injustices, acts of lawlessness and forced conversions have been carried out against the Orthodox Serbs and other fellow citizens, which is alien to the spirit of every Muslim'. It stated:

Every true Muslim, exalted by the sublime tenets of Islam, condemns such misdeeds, from whichever side they come, for he knows that the Islamic religion deems the worst sin to be the killing and torture of innocents, as well as the seizure of foreign goods, as well as forced conversions... Condemning all this, we wish that there be introduced complete equality and equality of rights, law and order for all, regardless of religious and national identification.<sup>108</sup>

The Banja Luka Resolution condemned:

The killing of priests and other notables without trial and sentence; the execution and torture on a huge scale of frequently totally innocent men, women and even children; the driving en masse from their homes and beds of entire families, with a deadline of one to two hours to prepare for their deportation to unknown places; the seizure and plunder of their possessions and their forced conversion to the Catholic faith; all these are facts that have shocked every honest person and which have, for us Muslims in these parts, been most unwelcome.

The resolution went on:

One part of the Catholic clergy believes that its time has come, and it is taking advantage of it without scruple. Propaganda for christening has taken such momentum that it recalls the Spanish Inquisition... The equality of Islam, frequently stressed in articles and in speeches, has been brought into question in life and in practice. There are frequently heard crude rhymes on the part of the Ustasha-Catholics, which insult the feelings of the Muslims and promise them the same fate as the Orthodox Christians.

The resolution consequently demanded that 'there be introduced true security of life and property and freedom of religion for all inhabitants of this state'.<sup>109</sup> Although the Resolution of Banja Luka Muslims condemned the activities of the Communists, many of its signatories were active in the NOP or would become so in the coming months.<sup>110</sup>

The Tuzla Resolution was issued in response to a massacre of Muslims by Chetniks at the East Bosnian village of Koraj and in response to the rebel advance on Tuzla itself. It claimed desperately, 'From all this chaos up till now, mostly and almost solely have suffered the Muslims', as a result of 'attacks on the Serbs on the part of irresponsible elements' that had 'incited acts of revenge' against the Muslims. Yet although 'our Muslim people, inspired by the spirit of Islamic culture and ethics, denounces all disorder', yet 'everywhere, with evil intentions, the word is spread that the Muslims are to blame for the acts against the Serbs, and all odium is placed on the Muslims, and things presented as if this were the mutual settling of scores between the Serbs and the Muslims'. Consequently, 'The Muslims because of this, particularly in our region, lie in a difficult position, left completely

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to themselves, for it looks as though the defence against the Chetniks up till now has not succeeded in full measure.<sup>111</sup>

The Bijeljina Resolution was apparently issued on the initiative of the independently minded Ustasha *tabornik* of Bijeljina, Murat-beg Pašić, a former member of the General Council of Gajret and a participant in the Muslim Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina of 1939–41, consequently much more of a Muslim autonomist than a genuine Ustasha, who behaved independently of the regime in Zagreb. The resolution denounced in Bosnian-patriotic terms the atrocities being committed by both the Ustasas and the rebels:

The country in which we live is Bosnia, in which Bosnians have lived and continue to live regardless of religion and tribe. In these parts, there was Serbian and Croatian influence in equal measure. The same language is spoken, customs are shared and love for the native land is equal. We speak in the first place as Bosnians, for a great part of the misfortunes of today has struck just our Bosnia and the Bosnians... The Bosnians have their history and had their mighty state, just as did the Croats and Serbs, and played across the centuries an honourable role of joining brothers of different religions.

On this basis of historic Bosnian patriotism cutting across religious boundaries, the resolution demanded that the NDH protect all its citizens regardless of religion:

For hundreds of years the Bosnian Muslims have lived in unity and love with all Bosnians regardless of religion, just as exalted Islam commands, and when they held all power in their hands they did not, even then, commit atrocities against their co-citizens, nor did they propagate religious or tribal hatred. Just as Muslims have up till now enjoyed the same rights as Serbs and Croats, so today too we seek that we all be equal according to the law, that we all be guaranteed safety and security and peace in our family and religious lives, as well as in regard to our private property.

In the present circumstances the 'Catholic and Muslim, like the true Greek Easterner, and particularly the Muslim Croat' was threatened with 'mortal danger'. Conversely: 'The salvation of Bosnia lies in unity and brotherhood, not in division and hatred. Let religion not divide us; rather let it unite us by acting benignly upon all of us, so that we behave in the first place as people who do not allow themselves to be ruled by retrograde animal instincts of killing and plunder, burning and torture, which the civilised person must restrain'.<sup>112</sup> In April 1943, following the killing by Home Guards of a Muslim farm labourer, Pašić led a demonstration of Muslims in protest. The demonstrators assembled outside a mosque to hear Enver Pozderović, head of the Bijeljina high school, give a speech in which he claimed that 'Bosnia-Herzegovina has always been independent and it needs no king or anyone to defend it'. Pašić, in his speech, denounced the Croats for creating strife between Serbs and Muslims but also claimed that the River Drina, on the frontier with Serbia, belonged to the Muslims alone and would always remain so and that the Muslims alone would fight for Bosnia-Herzegovina, albeit under German military protection.<sup>113</sup>

Another early Muslim initiative against the Ustasha genocide concerned the so-called 'White Gypsies', a community of largely settled, Slav-speaking and Islamic Roma who were among those destined by the Ustasas for extermina-



tion. The NDH's Gypsy population, numbering 25–40,000 in 1941, was almost wholly exterminated by the Nazis and Ustasas, but the attempt to exterminate the White Gypsies ran up against Muslim opposition. On 26 May 1941, notables from the ranks of the Muslims of the town of Zenica in Central Bosnia rallied in defence of the threatened Romanies. According to the meeting's resolution: 'The Zenica Muslims held a meeting on the occasion of the sending to a concentration camp of Muslims, so-called "Gypsies", from Travnik, and on the occasion of rumours that the same will be done with other Muslim so-called "Gypsies" of Herceg-Bosna...' The resolution demanded the return of the arrested Gypsies and an end to their persecution and deportation. Meetings of this kind occurred in several places in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a committee was formed in Sarajevo to protest the issue. In the face of fierce Muslim opposition, the NDH authorities on 30 August halted all further deportation of the 'White Gypsies' to concentration camps.<sup>114</sup>

Muslims, like Serbs, responded to the threat of national extermination by organising paramilitary formations. As the Serb rebellion got under way and rebels burned Muslim villages and slaughtered their inhabitants, many Muslim Home Guards defected from the regular army to join local Muslim militias set up to defend their homes in the localities where they were under threat. These militias were more motivated than the NDH's regular army, but their members frequently felt no loyalty whatsoever to the Ustasha cause, even viewing Ustasas as an alien enemy equivalent to the Serb rebels. In response to the desperation of the Muslim public and the failure of the NDH forces to offer protection, members of the Muslim elite were by the end of the year putting themselves at the head of this spontaneous Muslim movement of self-defence and organising autonomous Muslim military forces.

In Bijeljina, the initiator of this enterprise was Pašić. During the bloody showdown between the Chetniks and Partisans at nearby Vukosavci in February 1942 Pašić allegedly sent forty armed Muslims, at the request of the Majevisa Communist leader Fadil Jahić-Španac, to fight on the Partisan side.<sup>115</sup> Pašić was not trusted by the Ustasha regime; according to one of his enemies within the Ustasha movement, he agitated 'in favour of Bosnia coming under German administration on the grounds that the NDH is not competent to administer Bosnia'. Pašić also allegedly blocked Ustasha attempts to force the Serbs of Bijeljina and its vicinity to convert to Catholicism.<sup>116</sup> His support for the formation of autonomous Muslim armed forces was in line with this activity. Pašić may have been behind the efforts of a certain Alija Suliković to found an anti-Ustasha 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian Liberation Movement' in Bijeljina in the autumn of 1942. According to a UNS report: 'The aforementioned Suliković associates with all the prominent Muslims in Bijeljina'.<sup>117</sup> It is not known whether anything came of this initiative.

In Tuzla, already in September 1941 the Great Župan Ragib Čaplić advocated the formation of an autonomous Muslim military force; he was reported to have said during a visit to the town of Kalesija, near Tuzla, 'This [area] is neither Serb nor Croat'. The Tuzla merchant Muhamed-aga Hadžiefendić, who had served as an officer in both the Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav armies, began to organise armed Muslim resistance to the rebels in November, when he successfully repelled an attack on the Muslim village of Puračić. After receiving permission from



Zagreb, he summoned on 20 December a gathering of local and village Muslim leaders of the region to begin organising a Muslim legion. On 22 December, the 'Volunteer section of the people's uprising of Major Hadžiefendić' was formally proclaimed in Tuzla.

By the spring of 1942, there were five thousand troops under Hadžiefendić's command, covering an area from Gračanica in the west and Orašje and Bosanski Šamac in the north to Zvornik and Bijeljina in the east and Kladanj to the south. In July, they assumed the name 'Home Guard Volunteer Regiment' (Domobransko-dobrovoljačka pukovnija, Domdo), and by the end of the year six Domdo battalion staffs were set up, located in Bijeljina, Brčko, Gračanica, Puračić, Živinice and Tojšiće and all subordinate to Hadžiefendić's command in Tuzla.<sup>118</sup> The Domdo legions were largely recruited haphazardly from among the Muslim peasantry of north-east Bosnia and their discipline and behaviour tended to resemble that of the rebels they were fighting. Domdo legionnaires plundered the homes even of peaceful Serb villages, beating and occasionally killing the inhabitants. They were aggressive and contemptuous towards the NDH's regular army and police and Croats generally, treating their area of operations as Muslim territory in which they as Muslims were in charge.<sup>119</sup> The Germans, for their part, realised that the Muslim legions could not be relied upon; Lieutenant General Lüters reported in December 1942 that 'in the event of a serious Partisan attack, they would surrender or go over to them'.<sup>120</sup>

The Muslim legions helped to undermine the existing order, for the existence of a legally sanctioned autonomous Muslim military formation made it more difficult for the Usthas to consolidate their own 'state'. The legions provided a cover for draft-dodgers to avoid military service in the Home Guard while pretending to serve in the legions.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, this disruption of the NDH was probably deliberate. Hadžiefendić himself was a dedicated Muslim autonomist whose Islamic, non-Croat rhetoric increasingly earned him the disfavour of the Usthas.<sup>122</sup> The Muslim autonomists of Sarajevo and other towns attempted to extend Hadžiefendić's legion to their own area or to set up Muslim militias of their own, employing El-Hidaje as a front organisation for this purpose. Their long-term goal was the separation of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the NDH. Among those involved in this project in Sarajevo were Hadžihasanović, Hafiz Muhamed efendi Pandža, director of the Merhamet philanthropic society and member of the Ulema Medžlis or High Islamic Council, and the city mayor Mustafa Softić, Hadžihasanović's son-in-law; in Banja Luka the former Radical politician Suljaga Salihagić; in Mostar, the former mufti Omer Džabić and others. They included veterans of the Muslim movements for autonomy of 1899–1909 under Austria-Hungary and of 1939–41 under Yugoslavia. In Sarajevo five Muslim militias were formed: at Vratnik, Hrasnica, Nahorevo, Jarčedol and Kotarac.<sup>123</sup>

### *The Muslim National Military-Chetnik Organisation*

In eastern Herzegovina Muslim alienation from the NDH, coupled with the mortal threat posed by the Chetniks backed by the Italians, gave rise to a form of Muslim militia that sought to accommodate itself to the Italian-Chetnik order and was specifically directed against the Usthas and Partisans: the Muslim National Military-Chetnik Organisation. This was a variation on the theme of the Muslim

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militias that appeared elsewhere in Bosnia, but one that reflected peculiarly Hercegovinian conditions. One section of the Hercegovinian Muslim political world had traditionally been Serb-oriented, ever since the Serb-Muslim collaboration against Austria-Hungary; its most eloquent and radical Muslim spokesman had been the poet Osman Ćikić. At the same time, the Muslim population of Hercegovina from 1941 faced particular danger in what was the most distant and demographically Serb-dominated part of the NDH, where anti-Muslim chauvinism was strongest. This tradition and danger produced the Muslim Chetnik phenomenon in Hercegovina.

The collapse of the Ustasha administration, the Partisan retreat westward and the friendship of the Italians left the Chetniks as the masters of eastern Hercegovina. Chetnik triumphalism was expressed in frequent attacks on Muslim and Croat civilians that seemed to herald worse to come, for as the UNS reported that summer: 'Muslims from the villages have stated that the Chetniks told them that as soon as they had finished with the Partisans, i.e. destroyed them, the turn would come of the Muslims and Ustashes; they furthermore cursed their Ustasha mothers'. Rumours circulated in the region that the Italians had promised the Serbs that 'the whole of Bosnia-Hercegovina would be annexed to Montenegro'. Ustasha-Chetnik collaboration and the Chetnik attacks on Muslim Partisan units were perceived by sections of the Hercegovinian Muslim population as evidence of a concerted anti-Muslim policy on the part of the Ustashes and Chetniks and as a 'threat to Islam'.<sup>124</sup> The retreat of the Partisan main army through Hercegovina and south-west Bosnia in the summer and autumn of 1942 drew the Italians and Chetniks together, not just against the Partisans but also against the Muslims and Croats generally. There were cases of the Italian military authorities encouraging, assisting and even commanding the Chetniks in their attacks on the civilian population.<sup>125</sup>

The Italians were openly complicit in Chetnik atrocities against the Muslims and Croats. In August the Chetniks, with Italian approval, attacked the Ustashes in Foča and drove them out of the town, in the process massacring about three thousand Muslim civilians.<sup>126</sup> When Chetniks enrolled in the Italians' Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia massacred twenty-two Croats, including a priest, in the vicinity of Stolac in September, the Italian authorities took no action.<sup>127</sup> In October, the Italians launched an offensive codenamed Alfa in the region to the north-west of the middle course of the Neretva, recapturing Prozor and other towns from the Partisans. The Chetniks under Baćović and Dobroslav Jevđević participated enthusiastically in the offensive, burning Croat and Muslim villages and killing civilians in the process. The Ustashes complained about this to the Italians, who were compelled to discipline the Chetniks and disband some of their units before proceeding with a second operation (Beta) against the Partisans in the Livno region.<sup>128</sup> The Italians continued to rely on the Chetniks and grant them a degree of freedom in their treatment of the Muslim and Croat population.

The failure of the NDH to defend the Muslim population of Hercegovina accelerated the mobilisation of the latter against the Ustasha regime. As the Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment in Mostar reported in mid November 1942:

The Italian military forces are distributed across the entire territory of this regiment. The anti-Partisan actions, which they are taking, regularly end in the destruction of our citizens

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and their property—they plunder and carry away everything they come across in the course of their actions. Our people fear their and the Chetniks' activities more than those of the Partisans. That is one of the reasons why the Partisans are acquiring ever more supporters.<sup>129</sup>

In mid-January 1943, on the eve of the large-scale Axis anti-Partisan offensive known as Operation Weiss, or in Partisan terminology the 'Fourth Enemy Offensive', the same source reported

The attitude of the Croatian [i.e. Croat and Muslim] part of the population towards the State and its Supreme Body is particularly weak across the whole territory of our regiment... The Chetniks mobilised in the so-called Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia, well armed and in other respects shielded by the Italians, do not carry out massive attacks on our population, but on an individual basis and wherever they see the chance to plunder property and massacre our peaceful population... The Roman Catholic population of the Stolac district has entirely fled, while almost the entire Muslim population has remained and is now left to the mercy or mercilessness of the Chetnik bands who dominate the entire territory of the district.<sup>130</sup>

In this context of apparent Chetnik triumph, Italian supremacy, Ustasha collapse and complete Muslim vulnerability, one section of the Muslim elite in Hercegovina turned towards the Chetniks and collaborated with them against the Ustashes and Partisans. This was in part an expression of Italian policy that aimed to mobilise the population of Italy's zone of the NDH into the Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia. The Chetnik command's delegate in eastern Bosnia-Hercegovina, Dobroslav Jevđević, responded to the Foča massacre of August 1942 with a threatening proclamation to the Muslim population of East Bosnia demanding that they join the struggle against the Ustashes, in which he also stated: 'I personally believe that in a future state the Muslims have no other choice but to finally and definitely accept Serb nationality and renounce their speculative manoeuvring between the Serb and Croat nations, above all because all the lands in which the Muslims live will indisputably and inviolably become part of the Serb state entity'.<sup>131</sup> To most politically conscious Muslims this represented a threat, but to some it represented an opportunity.

Among the principal representatives of the pro-Chetnik Muslim current were Ismet Popovac, Mustafa Pašić and Major Fehim Musakadić. Popovac and Pašić joined the Serb rebels in 1941;<sup>132</sup> they then declared for the Chetniks. Popovac, the former mayor of Konjic, thereupon built a Muslim Chetnik militia through collaboration with the Italians.<sup>133</sup> Popovac's militia was formally named 'The Muslim National Military-Chetnik Organisation'. On 21 July 1942 Popovac wrote to Draža Mihailović to assure him that 'the Muslims have never as a whole, or via any kind of qualified forum, recognised the Croatian state', and to urge that 'the Muslims be gathered in either a joint or a specific Chetnik detachment'. To assist in the mobilisation of Muslims in the Chetniks, Popovac suggested to Mihailović that he should 'adopt a prominent Muslim, who has a good voice and political roots among the people, and give him an appropriate rank as Muslim representative and advisor on all questions that relate to the areas in which Muslims live'.<sup>134</sup> Mihailović eventually appointed Musakadić, former Sarajevo chief of police, as the

commander of his Muslim Chetnik forces, and another Muslim, Mustafa Mulalić, as vice-chairman of the Chetniks' Central National Committee.<sup>135</sup>

Popovac's Muslim Chetniks remained nationally conscious Muslims despite their Serb colouring; they pursued the traditional Muslim goals of survival and autonomy through collaboration with the Chetniks, just as their pro-Croat counterparts did through collaboration with the Ustasas. It was the opinion of Vladimir Zečević, one of Mihailović's agents in Hercegovina, that Popovac's 'main goal was to protect the Muslims, rather than to struggle for the Serb nation and Serb affairs'.<sup>136</sup> This assertion is supported by the fact that Popovac was in close contact with Suljaga Salihagić, one of the authors of the Muslim Memorandum to Hitler of November 1942. Popovac saw Salihagić, a former member of the Serb-nationalist People's Radical Party, as a logical choice for organiser of Muslim Chetnik formations in Bosanska Krajina; that there could be collaboration between the pro-Chetnik Popovac and the pro-German Salihagić indicates the extent to which the solidarity among members of the Muslim elite overrode differences of political orientation.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, the Muslim Chetnik leaders declared in December 1942 that 'the Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina and in all parts of the country are an integral and indivisible part of Serbdom', but also that their goal was a state 'organised on the principle of democracy and social rights in which the Muslims will be equal citizens'.<sup>138</sup> In early January 1943 they announced their goals as 'the organisation and arming of the Muslims in Bosnia-Hercegovina and other parts of Yugoslavia' and 'the unity and organisation of all Muslims on the basis of all for one and one for all'.<sup>139</sup> Such a goal could, at best, arouse mixed feelings among the Chetnik leaders.

The existence of a pro-Chetnik current among the Hercegovinian Muslims nevertheless coincided with the policy of the Chetniks in eastern Hercegovina at the time, which was to divide the Muslim and Croat populations by concentrating attacks on the latter.<sup>140</sup> Popovac held talks with Mihailović's officers Baćović and Jevđević in late September or early October 1942 and agreed to form a Muslim Chetnik organisation.<sup>141</sup> This was eventually legalised by the Italian military authorities in Hercegovina as a section of their Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia. That month Popovac issued an appeal to the Muslims in the Partisan ranks on a Serb nationalist and anti-Croat basis, calling upon them to desert and join his forces.<sup>142</sup> Popovac claimed on 3 November in a letter to Mihailović:

I have to emphasise to you the intimate cooperation between the Muslims and Orthodox in the Stolac district from where, through the joint struggle of the Muslims and Orthodox, the Croat inhabitants, who were largely Ustasha-inclined, have been expelled. In that way, from Gabela to Mostar the entire left bank of the Neretva has been cleansed, and the number of refugees is estimated at 12,000 people.<sup>143</sup>

This Muslim collaboration with the Chetniks on an anti-Croat basis did provide a degree of protection for the Hercegovinian Muslims, who were enrolled in the Italian-Chetnik militias, while the Croats were forced to flee.<sup>144</sup> Popovac and Pašić convened a meeting of the Muslim Chetnik leaders in late November 1942 which resolved that its goal was, in the words of an Ustasha secret police report, 'that the Muslims enrol in the Chetniks, supposedly as a Muslim militia, to protect the Muslim element'.<sup>145</sup>

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Popovac's Muslim Chetniks formed part of a broader Hercegovinian Muslim autonomist circle. In Mostar in September 1942, an assembly of Hercegovinian Muslim notables gathered in Mostar and resolved:

We Hercegovinians and Bosnians are nobody's property and we recognise the right of nobody to persecute us; so, insofar as our brothers in Zagreb do not wish to accede to our demands, we shall seek protection of our interests from other big powers from the ranks of our allies... The question of Bosnian-Hercegovinian independence will remain for us open, so long as our patriotic honour is not restored to us and peace reestablished.<sup>146</sup>

The assembly founded an 'Action Council for the autonomy of Bosnia-Hercegovina' which took steps to protect Muslim interests as it saw them.

On 6 October a conference of Muslim notables was held in Mostar which resolved to send a delegation to Italy's General Santovito to express the loyalty of the Muslims of Hercegovina to the Kingdom of Italy and to demand weapons for Muslim self-defence. A second conference on 8 October resolved to collaborate with Popovac's Muslim Chetnik faction to win Italian confidence and to send a delegation directly to Rome. The delegation included the former mufti Omer Džabić, whose uncle Ali Fehmi had led the Hercegovinian Muslim autonomist movement of 1899–1909, as well as a representative of Popovac's Muslim Chetniks. It stayed in Italy in the second half of October and held talks with the Italian government and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. The Italians agreed to arm the Muslims on condition the latter would fight only under the Italian Army. The delegation may also have sought the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Hercegovina under Italian protection and done so with the blessing of Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović's Sarajevo-based autonomist faction.<sup>147</sup> On 17 March Popovac, Pašić and Musakadić declared: 'The Muslim National Military Organisation is a constituent part of the Chetnik movement under the supreme Chetnik command, and is the only true representative of the Muslims of Bosnia, Hercegovina and other Muslim areas of our country'.<sup>148</sup>

Popovac's enterprise was not, however, warmly embraced by the Italian authorities, whose divide-and-rule tactics sought to keep the Serb Chetniks and Muslim militias separate rather than to encourage Serb-Muslim cooperation.<sup>149</sup> Popovac furthermore received only lukewarm support from Mihailović's command. Chetnik commanders could not permit the arming even of friendly Muslim forces without arousing opposition from within their own ranks, and tended anyway to think in terms of playing Muslims against Croats and vice versa rather than sincerely aiming to build a multinational movement. As Zečević said regarding Popovac: 'We shall do everything to divide the Muslims among themselves and make use of them for our purposes, but the outlook is not favourable'.<sup>150</sup> In Hercegovina in this period, the Chetniks attempted to turn the Muslim population against the Croats and, according to Partisan reports, 'killed Croats totally, Muslims partially'.<sup>151</sup> This did not attract many Muslims to Popovac's banner and the Muslim Chetnik option remained a dead letter as Chetnik atrocities against Muslims increased during the early months of 1943. The units of the Muslim National Military-Chetnik Organisation, composed of reluctant fighters, were infiltrated by the NOP, which succeeded in keeping some of them out of conflicts with the Partisans.<sup>152</sup> Such as they were, these units proved militarily worthless in action

against the Partisans during the Battle of the Neretva. When in July 1943 the Partisan 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade re-entered Hercegovina, it succeeded in killing Popovac and Musakadić, two of the three principal Muslim Chetnik leaders; the organisation thereupon effectively disintegrated.<sup>153</sup>

### *The Muslim Memorandum to Hitler*

The Muslim Memorandum to Hitler of November 1942 was the most notorious expression of Muslim resistance to the Ustashas and of Muslim collaborationism vis-à-vis the Nazis. The memo represented the culmination of activity on the part of the pro-German, anti-Ustasha wing of the Muslim autonomist movement. Up until the summer and autumn of 1943, Muslim autonomist activity aimed predominantly at direct collaboration with the Germans to bypass the Ustashas, rather than at direct resistance activity. On 29 May 1942, a group of Banja Luka notables met to establish a council for the purpose of organising an independent Muslim battalion for action against the Partisans. At the same time, they resolved to send a memorandum to Berlin to demand autonomy for Bosnia-Hercegovina. This move was provoked by a long-running power struggle between the Banja Luka Muslim community and the anti-Muslim Ustasha administration of the town.<sup>154</sup> Muslim discontent grew with the Chetnik massacres of Muslim civilians in the summer of 1942, widely seen as the consequence of Ustasha persecution of the Serbs, so that the Ustashas and Chetniks were viewed as a joint threat, much as they were by the Partisans. At the annual assembly of El-Hidaje held on 16 August 1942 many of the participants expressed concern at the threat posed to the existence of the Muslims from both the Ustashas and the Chetniks.<sup>155</sup>

The campaign for an autonomous Muslim military force across the whole of Bosnia-Hercegovina was from August 1942 taken up by National Salvation, an umbrella organisation grouping representatives of the various Muslim societies and associations in Bosnia-Hercegovina. Spurred by the massacre of Muslims in Foča earlier that month, the founding conference of National Salvation was held in Sarajevo on 26 August, presided over by Safet Bašić, representative of the Reis ul-Ulema, the Muslim religious community's most senior figure, and attended by about three-hundred Muslim notables. The opening speech was delivered by Muhamed Pandža, who raised the demand for an independent Muslim armed force to enable the Muslims to defend themselves. The conference denounced the failure of the NDH authorities to protect the Muslims of East Bosnia; called for the Muslims to appeal over the NDH to the Germans, the Italians, the Allies and the Islamic world; and resolved in favour of 'the joint cooperation of the entire population of Bosnia-Hercegovina and the complete unity of Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics'.

The leadership of National Salvation that was then elected consisted of El-Hidaje leader Mehmed efendi Handžić, Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović and five other Muslim notables. It formed the unofficial national leadership of the Muslim nation at that time and aspired both to an independent foreign policy and to the financing and arming of Muslim resistance to the rebels. This group worked actively to inform the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, the Kings of Saudi Arabia and Egypt and the President of Turkey, as well as the British, Americans and Soviets, of the plight of the Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>156</sup> A forty-eight-member

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Council of National Salvation was elected at this time, including the former politicians Šefkija Behmen, Zaim Šarac and Hamdija Karamehmedović. According to a UNS report, 'the goal of the leading Muslim figures is to remain further in the position of leading figures, that is they wish that the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims guarantee them a majority. Their attempts at achieving this are various and one of the most important, which is being constantly drawn out across several years, is the autonomy of Bosnia'.<sup>157</sup> Following a second massacre of Muslims by Chetniks at Višegrad, a new seven-member Council of National Salvation was elected, headed by Handžić and Pandža, to defend Muslims under threat in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to care for refugees.<sup>158</sup> In March 1943 El-Hidaje took over the extremist Young Muslim organisation in what represented a closing of ranks between the conservative and radical wings of the Muslim autonomist movement. National Salvation sought to extend the system of autonomous Muslim armed forces begun by Hadžiefendić in Tuzla in 1941. Pandža visited Pavelić on 30 October 1942 to suggest the formation of a force of Muslim legions across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with Hadžiefendić, Sulejman Filipović or Šefket Hasandedić as possible commanders. The request was then presented to the German military authorities. However, the Ustasas were hostile to the Muslim-autonomist character of the legions and limited them to the Tuzla region.<sup>159</sup>

The Muslim autonomist campaign for autonomous Muslim military forces thereupon grew into a demand made directly to Hitler for Bosnian autonomy under the Reich. On 1 November 1942 a group of leading Muslim politicians, going by the name of the National Committee, presented their Memorandum to Hitler, or 'Our Führer!', as they warmly addressed him. Besides Hadžihasanović, its authors appear to have been Softić, Salihagić and, according to one source, Pandža.<sup>160</sup> The Memorandum claimed:

Nobody, not a single ethnic group, not a single tribe, likewise not a single nation in all Europe has with greater devotion felt and understood your gigantic movement to establish a new order in Europe as have we Bosnians, Muslims of Bosnia. We have in the principles of National Socialism, your movement, felt that it alone brings justice, order and peace to Europe, which has been blighted and ruined by democracy.

The Memorandum made every effort to appeal to Hitler in a language that he would understand, claiming that the Bosnian Muslims were in origin 'Goths, i.e. a Germanic tribe named Bosnia'. It denounced Pavelić's commissioner for Bosnia, Božidar Bralo, as a protector of the Jews: 'He thwarted your intentions and order regarding the Jews, beginning immediately to accept many Jews in Bosnia into the Catholic Church, particularly in Sarajevo, where they are very numerous and very rich. In that way he attempted to protect them from what, after the victory and occupation of this country, had to happen'. It was the Jews, claimed the Memorandum, who were responsible for the Serb rebellion, for under Ustasha protection they 'began once again their treasonous work. They began to organise Chetnik and rebel bands and generously to assist them materially'. Nevertheless, the Memorandum referred to the fact that 'the Jewish problem among us has finally been solved...'<sup>161</sup>

So far as Bosnia-Herzegovina was concerned, the Memorandum spoke of Pavelić's violation of 'the historical right of Bosnia to its separateness' and com-



plained that the civil war was the product of the illegitimate Ustasha rule: 'If Bosnia had been treated as we had expected, if the Muslims had been organised and armed under the leadership of the German armed forces and been called upon to collaborate in the administration, in Bosnia, it would not have come to all this'. The Memorandum therefore requested: 'That now within the Croatian state, on the territory of Bosnia, a political-administrative authority be formed named the "Župa of Bosnia", with its seat in Sarajevo. The chief of this *župa* would be appointed solely and exclusively by you, our Führer'. All Muslims currently serving in the Ustashes and Home Guard on NDH territory were to be withdrawn and formed into a Bosnian Guard, based on the existing Muslim legions and under the command of Hadžiefendić: 'Because, for the short period of existence of the Croatian state, we have come to the complete realisation that only a Bosniak can defend and protect his Bosnia'.

The Memorandum demanded the Ustasha movement be abolished in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It requested: 'That the foundation of a National Socialist Party be enabled on the territory of Bosnia'. Following the German victory, the Memorandum requested from Hitler 'that you include your territory, our Bosnia, in the camp of other European communities under your protection and give it the same independence that our neighbours will have'. The Muslims were to be guaranteed an absolute ethnic majority in Bosnia-Herzegovina through the cession of Serb- and Croat-majority borderland areas to neighbouring countries and through population exchanges with them.<sup>162</sup> In this way the Muslim autonomists sought, through the Memorandum, a rump Bosnia-Herzegovina with an ethnic Muslim majority under the protection of a foreign power. Be that as it may, and despite the obsequious Hitlerite window-dressing, the Muslim Memorandum was expressing traditional Muslim autonomist demands that found similar expression in other political currents.

## *The 13th SS Division 'Handschar'*

Among the Nazi leadership, the greatest interest in the idea of an autonomous Muslim army under German command was shown by Heinrich Himmler, who viewed the Islamic world as a potential ally against the British Empire and for whom the NDH was a 'ridiculous state'.<sup>163</sup> At Himmler's suggestion, Hitler approved in February 1943 the establishment of an SS division made up of Bosnian Muslims. The Ustasha functionary Alija Šuljak arrived in Tuzla at the end of March 1943 with the goal of mobilising the Muslim population behind the formation of a Bosnian SS division. For this purpose he held, with the assistance of the German SS, rallies in Živinice and Gračanica where he called upon the Muslims to join the division. From 30 March until 10 April 1943, at the request both of Himmler and of leading Muslim notables, the former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini toured Zagreb, Sarajevo and Banja Luka in order to meet Muslim notables and agitate for the formation of a Bosnian SS division. Following the failure to attract the required number of volunteers, the Germans turned to conscription and plundered the NDH armed forces for recruits, decimating several units of the latter in the process. Three thousand Muslims were eventually released from service in the NDH armed forces to serve in the division, at great



cost to Home Guard and Ustasha morale.<sup>164</sup> The name chosen for the Division was the '13<sup>th</sup> SS Volunteer Bosnian-Herzegovinian Division (Croatia)', an attempt to reconcile the feelings of both its Croat and Muslim members.<sup>165</sup> Yet it was more commonly known as the Handschar (Scimitar) Division.

The formation of a Muslim SS division was supported by elements within the Muslim elite who hoped that it could be used to achieve their own national goals. Pandža later claimed during his interrogation by the Partisans in the autumn of 1943 that 'at the time of the foundation of the Muslim SS division it was assured us that the division would act only as a guardian of peace and order on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and that it would not leave that territory'. He said that he had been promised by al-Husseini that 'this division would definitely remain in Bosnia-Herzegovina, that it would be formed and trained there and that its sole task would be to defend the Muslims from those who would attack Muslims'. Pandža also said that he had been told that 'that division would enable the separation of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the NDH and the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina that would be included within the German new order'.<sup>166</sup> In practice the Handschar Division did not live up to the Muslim autonomists' expectations, and among the Muslim militia leaders in East Bosnia its formation proved divisive. The Division was, unlike the militias, an offensive force capable of deployment outside Bosnia-Herzegovina. As such, its recruitment of Muslims threatened to leave Muslim homes, villages and towns undefended. The Division's absence from Bosnia-Herzegovina for training during 1943 simply facilitated Chetnik and Partisan attacks on Muslim areas.<sup>167</sup> This acted as a catalyst for the defection of large segments of the Muslim population from the quislings to the Partisans and hence the eventual Communist triumph in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### *Beginnings of a synthesis*

The ultimate triumph of the NOP in Bosnia-Herzegovina depended on its co-option of Muslim autonomist opposition to the Ustasha regime. The first triumph, in this regard, was the NOP's success, in the autumn of 1942, in mobilising the Muslims of the north-western tip of Bosnia, known as Cazinska Krajina. This was made possible by the confluence of a number of factors: the existence of a powerful anti-Ustasha Muslim-autonomist current in the region; the activism of a well-organised local NOP network; the collaboration of sympathetic members of the regional Muslim elite; and the presence of powerful Partisan military forces. Consequently, it was in Cazinska Krajina that a synthesis first began to emerge between the NOP and elements of the Muslim autonomist resistance and the mass entry of Muslims into the NOP truly began. This phenomenon would subsequently repeat itself in other areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina as the war progressed.

Cazinska Krajina had long possessed the identity of a frontier territory. It was the last part of present-day Bosnia to be conquered by the Ottomans; surrounded on all sides by Orthodox-inhabited territory, it formed, in Professor Ivo Banac's words, a 'solid Muslim lagoon' in a 'Serb Orthodox island'.<sup>168</sup> The identity of the Cazinska Krajina Muslims, more than others in Bosnia, was moulded by their status as a militarily autonomous frontier people perennially threatened by Chris-

tian neighbours. Cazinska Krajina's population in 1942 was about 46,000, of which more than three-quarters were Muslim and most of the remainder Serb. At the centre of the 'lagoon' lay the town of Cazin. This population was in late 1942 chauvinistically hostile to the Serbs and a significant portion had collaborated in Ustasha crimes. It tended to be hostile to the rebels and in the political sense was unconquered territory for the Partisans. At the same time, it had not by the autumn of 1942 been integrated successfully into the Ustasha state. Upon taking power, the Ustasas had attempted unsuccessfully to co-opt the Muslim population by recruiting Muslim notables with influence in the region, above all the two most important: Nurija Pozderac, a former member of the General Council of the JMO, and Hasan Miljković, mayor of the town of Velika Kladuša and a former politician of the HSS. The sympathies of the population remained Muslim autonomist rather than Croat nationalist.

In the summer of 1941 Reis Spaho summoned Miljković and Pozderac to Sarajevo. He told them that he had learnt from reliable sources that Ustasha circles in Zagreb were planning the extermination not only of the Serbs but also of the Muslims in Bosanska Krajina and Cazinska Krajina and that this would be achieved by encouraging mutual slaughter between the two nationalities to do away with both groups and create the conditions for a purely Catholic Croat state.<sup>169</sup> Miljković suspected from early in the civil war that the Ustasas were pursuing an anti-Muslim policy: he privately claimed that the regime was banning conversions to Islam and massacring Serbs who tried to convert to Islam, and that the Catholic Croat Ustasas who carried out the massacres were dressed in fezzes so as to put the blame on the Muslims.<sup>170</sup> Spaho complained to the NDH government in February 1942 that Serb converts to Islam continued to be treated as enemies by the state, while those who converted to Catholicism were granted protection, and that the very act of conversion to Islam was often treated as a provocation by the Ustasas who murdered the converts. Furthermore, Jews who converted to Islam were not permitted to stop wearing the Star of David.<sup>171</sup> Croat Ustasas for their part accused their Muslim Ustasha counterparts of forcing local Serbs to convert to Islam.<sup>172</sup> Thus, even collaborationist Muslims in Cazinska Krajina were alienated by the Ustasha state, while the Muslims and Croats within the Ustasha movement were hostile to one another. In the summer and autumn of 1942, Miljković led two delegations to Pavelić to request arms for the establishment of an autonomous Muslim militia for action against the rebels. Pavelić received the delegations but turned down their requests.<sup>173</sup> Miljković thereupon drew up plans for a Muslim autonomist revolt against the Ustasha regime.<sup>174</sup> This native Muslim opposition to the Ustasas in Cazinska Krajina paralleled that of the NOP.

Prior to the Axis invasion Cazinska Krajina was placed under the organisational jurisdiction of the Okrug Committee of the KPH for Karlovac; in other words, it fell within the Croatian rather than the Bosnian Communist organisation. Apart from Bihać, the entire Cazinska Krajina remained throughout the war under the KPH, because the former's distance from Banja Luka had left it beyond the reach of the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina,<sup>175</sup> while the River Una formed a geographical barrier between Cazinska Krajina and the rest of Bosanska Krajina. Both the Bihać and the Karlovac Communist organisations were active in the

region via a web of KPJ members and sympathisers. The Croatian Partisan leadership, like its Bosnian counterpart, was faced with the question of how to organise the Muslim minority in its ranks and debated in late 1941 whether to dress Muslim Partisans like their Serb and Croat comrades or whether to give them fezzes with the red star and both the Serbian and Croatian tricolours.<sup>176</sup>

In the autumn of 1942 Ustasha repression increased in Cazinska Krajina, not only against the Communists but against members of the Muslim elite, and arrests took place in Cazin and other nearby towns.<sup>177</sup> This raised the stakes for the Communists, for while it alienated local Muslims from the Ustashes it also put the Communists under pressure to respond. In September 1942 the Cazin District Committee of the KPJ reported that 'the majority of the Muslims feel that their place is not in the fascist movement' and that 'the Muslim opposition had begun to close ranks'. In this context, the Cazinska Krajina Communists resolved 'to attempt to make use of the rising Muslim opposition in the NDH in order to have them as allies in the struggle against the occupiers and their domestic minions'.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, the inability of the local Communists to resist the Ustasha terror gave rise to popular disenchantment with the NOP.<sup>179</sup> The efforts of the Ustashes to strengthen their position in Cazinska Krajina became especially threatening when the Partisans received information in the autumn of 1942 that the former were attempting to mobilise an Ustasha Krajina Division, based in Bihać, that was to launch offensives against Partisan territory in western Bosanska Krajina.<sup>180</sup> In part to prevent this, the Partisans attacked and liberated Bihać on 2–4 November.

The Partisans then liberated, or conquered, the whole of Cazinska Krajina. Cazin was liberated by the Croatian Partisans on 6 November. With the installation of the Supreme Staff and Central Committee in Bihać, the large Partisan-held territory comprising parts of central Croatia and west Bosnia became known as the Bihać Republic. The territories under Partisan control included those where their political influence was strong (the regions of Kozara, Podgrmeč, Drvar and Bosanski Petrovac as well as the adjacent Croatian territories) and those where the population looked to the Ustashes or to the Muslim autonomists (Cazinska Krajina itself) or to the Chetniks (the regions of Manjača and Central Bosnia). This meant that the Partisan centre now had a hinterland immediately to its north and west with a largely hostile and predominantly Muslim population.

The NOP had the support of an active minority in the region and scored a considerable success in the very fact that the Muslim and Croat populations did not flee the arrival of the Partisans. On the eve of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of AVNOJ, the morale of the Communists in Cazinska Krajina was at its highest. There was a perception among them that the Muslim majority of the region, though still not actively supporting the Partisans, was on the verge of being won over on account of both Ustasha misrule and the Chetnik threat. The Partisans nevertheless inherited from the Ustashes the problem of how to co-opt the Muslim population of the region. The Communists saw the principal barrier to this as being the local Muslim 'bourgeois' politicians who had dominated the region's political life before the war and continued to enjoy the loyalty of the population. The two most important such politicians were Pozderac and Miljković. Both men were inclined to collaborate with the NOP, while the Communists were aware that

their own political standing with the Muslim masses depended on achieving such collaboration. They therefore sought to rule Cazinska Krajina using Pozderac and Miljković.<sup>181</sup>

Miljković was the most senior Muslim politician of the region to collaborate with the Ustashas, but for a short period he went over to the Partisans. Miljković's town of Velika Kladuša fell within the organisational framework of the KPH and had been liberated by the Croatian Partisans on 22 February 1942. Miljković, the members of his administration and the local Ustasha Commissioner had not participated in the Ustasha massacres of Serbs and did not flee the town as the Partisans entered it. The Partisans set up base at a Velika Kladuša hotel where they flew Serbian, Croatian and Muslim (but not Yugoslav) flags. As one Partisan eyewitness recalls: 'The Muslim flag was neither a state flag, nor a Party flag, nor a national flag. It was a religious flag, of normal size and green colour, and in the upper half were a crescent and a star. The Muslims viewed it as their religious banner. But they sometimes held that it was a national flag as a response to the Croats and Serbs who had their own national flags'. Following the liberation, a rally was held at the town hotel, at which spoke Huska Miljković, another native of Velika Kladuša and secretary of the District Committee for Velika Kladuša, with the head imam of the town by his side.

The Partisans held another public meeting at the hotel on 25 February to elect a municipal NOO, and offered Hasan Miljković, as the most popular town notable, the post of president. Although the latter had maintained links with the Partisans since the start of the uprising he refused the offer. His stance made other town notables reluctant to participate in the town government, but he nevertheless participated in the formation of the municipal NOO. This was the first municipal NOO to be established in Cazinska Krajina and consisted of one Croat and eight Muslim members. At the same meeting, Hasan Miljković publicly condemned the Ustasha massacres of the Serbs and called upon the people of the town to join the Partisans. Consequently, the Muslim youth of Velika Kladuša readily joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Muslim Company set up by the Partisans the following day, with Huska Miljković as commander. This was also the result of careful local politics on the part of the Velika Kladuša KPH organisation under the skilful Huska, himself an ambitious and self-willed local strongman whose machinations may have helped to dissuade Hasan from playing a more prominent role. A third reason for the successful mobilisation by the Partisans was the close links between the Muslim population and the Serbs of the town and the surrounding countryside.<sup>182</sup>

The KPH held the 1<sup>st</sup> Okrug Conference of the Karlovac Okrug at Velika Kladuša on 23–24 March, attended by the senior Yugoslav Communists Vlado Popović and Vladimir Bakarić. Of the fifty-three elected delegates to attend the meeting, thirty-two were Serbs, seventeen were Croats, three were Muslims and one a Slovene. The conference was attended by the imam Sulejman Topić and by Hasan Miljković, who delivered a speech calling for brotherhood and unity and Muslim resistance to both Ustashas and Chetniks, and supporting the view that Nazi Germany rather than the USSR was the enemy of all Slavs.<sup>183</sup> According to Popović: 'The holding of the conference in that region was of great importance for the mobilisation of the Muslim inhabitants for the Partisans. At the ceremonial part of the conference, representatives of certain bourgeois parties from the region

were invited. Thus it became practically a manifestation of the brotherhood of the Croats, Serbs and Muslims'.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, the Partisan success proved short-lived, as following the re-entry of the NDH forces into Velika Kladuša in late March Hasan Miljković abandoned the Partisans and did not collaborate with them again. In late May or early June the Croatian Partisans, whose rank and file in this region was predominantly Serb, further damaged their standing by burning down a number of Muslim villages in the area of Banija.<sup>185</sup> The Croatian Partisans reported in August: 'Regarding the inclusion of the Muslim population in the People's Liberation Struggle and their mobilisation in the Partisans, the situation is very poor'.<sup>186</sup> Following the establishment of the Bihać Republic the Communists planned to draw Hasan Miljković back into collaboration with them, using Huska as an intermediary, but these plans came to nothing.<sup>187</sup>

Pozderac never collaborated with the Ustashas and he condemned their atrocities against the Serbs.<sup>188</sup> He was recruited to the NOP with the assistance of the Orthodox priest Vlada Zečević, a political and personal friend of his from pre-war days who had joined the Partisans.<sup>189</sup> Pozderac chaired the first regular session of AVNOJ on 27 November and was also first vice-president of its Executive Council as well as president of the Cazin District NOO. He appealed at the 1<sup>st</sup> Session to 'all Muslims from Bihać and Krupa to join the ranks of the People's Liberation Army'. Since 'the Ustashas have committed crimes against the Muslims just as have the Chetniks...', all Muslims must realise that the triumph of our enemies' would mean 'the complete extermination of the Muslims'.<sup>190</sup> In mid-December, Pozderac issued an appeal, in the name of all NOOs in the Bihać, Bosanska Krupa and Cazin districts, to all Muslim refugees to return to their homes, claiming that the Partisans were founding Muslim volunteer detachments to guarantee their security.<sup>191</sup>

Pozderac was not, however, a passive tool of the Central Committee; he pursued his own policy. He came close to breaking with the Communists over the arrest of eight Ustashas from the village of Todorovo, believing them to be innocent. He subsequently accepted the evidence against three of the arrested people who were then executed, while two were released and the remaining three held pending a further investigation.<sup>192</sup> As president of the Cazin NOO, Pozderac intervened on behalf of people arrested by the Partisans and remained well disposed towards Hasan Miljković after the latter broke with the Partisans.<sup>193</sup> Pozderac nevertheless remained loyal to the NOP. Other Muslim notables did not: Imam Topić spoke in support of the NOP at a Partisan rally at Bužim, but subsequently defected to the Ustashas and was ultimately executed by the Partisans.<sup>194</sup>

The Partisans thus strove, with the assistance of Pozderac and without that of Hasan Miljković, to solidify their control over the heart of their 'state' through a concerted effort to increase their support among the Muslims. A mass Partisan rally was held in Bihać on 6 November, allegedly attended by several thousand of its citizens. Rallies were held subsequently in Cazin, Bužim, Otoka and other towns. At these rallies spoke Muslim Partisans native to the region, including Ajša Sadiković, secretary of the Bihać Local Committee and Hamdija Omanović, Local Commander for Bihać. On 28 November, a group of twenty-six Bihać citizens, most of them Muslims, gathered on the premises of the Muslim society Zora to issue a declaration on behalf of 'the entire citizenry of the town of Bihać regardless

of religious denomination' to the effect that 'the entire citizenry of the town of Bihać, regardless of differences of religious denomination, is overjoyed at the liberation of the town of Bihać and Bosanska Krajina by the People's Liberation Partisan Army'. The group declared that 'this broad conference has unanimously and spontaneously decided that in the town of Bihać and the broad surroundings, still stronger units of the Partisan or People's Liberation Army should be formed, in the belief that Bihać, as the centre of Bosanska Krajina in these fateful hours, has been called upon to carry out its historical mission'.<sup>195</sup> The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Bihać and Cazin issued an appeal to the people of the region on 15 December, assuring them:

our army does not exterminate innocent people, does not plunder, does not destroy mosques and churches, does not hang hodjas and priests, but brings freedom to Muslims, Croats and Serbs, allowing all people without discrimination to take their own destiny in their hands, to found their people's government, their People's Liberation Councils, to elect to them freely their best representatives.

It ended with a string of slogans that included 'Long live the armed brotherhood of Muslims, Croats and Serbs!'<sup>196</sup> Ivan Ribar, President of AVNOJ, attended a feast in celebration of Kurban-bajram at a Bihać hotel on the invitation of its Muslim management.<sup>197</sup>

The Partisans ensured that the Muslims were properly represented in the organs of government and a town NOO was elected for Bihać on 10–11 November with a five-member Executive Committee, of which three were Muslims (including the president and secretary), one a Croat (the vice-president) and one a Serb (the treasurer).<sup>198</sup> Five Local Commands were established for Cazinska Krajina, four of whose commanders were Muslims. They were subordinate to a Territorial Command whose commander was Petar Komnenić, a veteran soldier from Montenegro.<sup>199</sup> Elections for village and municipal NOOs were held on a region-wide basis; by the second half of December there were forty village, thirty municipal and one district NOOs in Cazinska Krajina with a total membership of 1,711.<sup>200</sup> By December, the NOP was also achieving some success in forming joint Muslim-Serb NOOs and in establishing Muslim-Serb cooperation in the management of local affairs. The NOOs in Muslim and in Serb villages supplied aid to Serb and to Muslim families respectively.<sup>201</sup>

The Partisans strove to mobilise the entire male population of Cazinska Krajina into their forces via the NOOs.<sup>202</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigades were established at the end of December. Of these, the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade was formed on Tito's initiative as a unit that would mobilise the Cazinska Krajina Muslims in the Partisans. Its kernel was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, a unit composed overwhelmingly of Serbs from Podgrmeč, around which were grouped the Muslims and a smaller number of Croats who had volunteered for the Partisans following the liberation of Cazinska Krajina. Its commander and political commissar were Muslims, as was its political department representative, but Serbs remained numerically preponderant in the staffs of its four battalions.<sup>203</sup> By January 1943, there were 972 fighters in the Brigade. Tito and Moša Pijade intended that the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade would be the kernel of an entire division of Muslims and Croats from Cazinska Krajina, to be established with the assistance of Pozderac

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and other activists from the region. This plan was foiled by Operation Weiss and the forced Partisan withdrawal from Cazinska Krajina.<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade became a successful multinational Partisan unit. The deputy political commissar of the brigade reported in July 1943: 'There is no disunion between the Serbs and the Muslims either in combat or during rest. Comradeship and collective consciousness are not present to the requisite degree, but there too there are signs of progress.' Furthermore, 'a sectarian stance towards women is present only to a small degree'.<sup>205</sup>

The question of activity among Muslims was closely related to the question of activity among women. Muslim women were the most difficult section of the population to mobilise: not a single woman was elected to a village NOO in a Muslim locality outside Cazin and Velika Kladuša, though this was not the case with Serb women in Serb localities.<sup>206</sup> The rural male Muslim population feared the Partisans coming into contact with their women and on occasion hid them prior to the arrival of NOP activists in the villages. The rural female Muslim population had to be approached by Muslim NOP activists, who learnt to do so as quietly as possible. As Ajša Maličević-Vujović, a former member of the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunističke Omladine Jugoslavije, SKOJ) relates, she and other Muslim woman activists would pass through a village and spend the night with local women who were prepared to put up tenants. This was permitted by the villagers since the guests in question were themselves Muslim women. Once inside the private houses, formalities were dispensed with and the women could talk together freely. In this way the NOP could slowly put down roots among the most politically untapped section of the Bosnian population.<sup>207</sup>

The success of the Partisans in putting down roots in the Muslim population of Cazinska Krajina during the two months following the liberation of Bihać was uncertain. Hajro Kapetanović, secretary of the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Bihać-Cazin, provided the balance sheet in his report to the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina of 4 January 1943. Support for the NOP across the region was uneven and many villages, particularly Croat villages, anticipated the return of the NDH's forces in the near future. Villagers volunteered for the NDH armed forces on the grounds that they needed to justify themselves in the event that the Ustashes returned. Despite the Partisan success in organising cross-national rallies to promote the ideal of brotherhood and unity, relations remained strained not only between Serbs and non-Serbs but between Croats and Muslims. Muslims blamed the Croats for the catastrophes of Ustasha rule; Croats despised the Muslims as vacillating and dishonest; while Serbs spoke of revenge against both Croats and Muslims.

The Bihać-Cazin Okrug Committee had jurisdiction over a KPJ organisation that included two district committees (Bihać and Cazin), two municipal committees and fifteen cells with a total of ninety members. The organisation was weak and its members generally young and inexperienced, though it was better in the Bihać district than in the more backward Cazin district. There were also 153 members of the SKOJ, almost all in the Bihać district. Party work in the villages in particular was weak or non-existent. The *okrug* had a territorial command with four local commands whose organisation and discipline were poor. Somewhat



## THE DUAL BOSNIAN RESISTANCE

over three thousand youth were enrolled in the NOP's youth organisations, mostly in the Bihać district. There were forty-one sections of the Antifascist Front of Women, thirty-four of which were in the Bihać district where their total membership was 1,120. The work of the Antifascist Front of Women was weak; particularly in the Cazin district there was conservative resistance to political activity on the part of women. NOOs were elected in all the villages of the Bihać district and fifty-one were elected in the Cazin district. Their members included many illiterates and opportunists and frequently lacked any authority among the villagers. Dozens of rallies and meetings were organised for women, youth, refugees and the population in general, which attracted tens of thousands of participants in total; also organised were musical and sports groups, youth centres and literacy classes. The other side of the coin was that about seven hundred people in total were arrested by the Partisans in these two districts, of whom one hundred were executed and the rest released.<sup>208</sup>

In military terms, the NOP success in Cazinska Krajina was short-lived, for the Partisans were forced to withdraw from the region by Operation Weiss in early 1943. They took with them Pozderac, who was subsequently killed at the Battle of the Sutjeska in the spring of 1943, when the Partisans were bloodily defeated by the Germans. Yet the NOP's mobilisation of the Cazinska Krajina Muslims in late 1942 and early 1943 established a pattern that was to be repeated across Bosnia-Herzegovina in the months and years to come. The Bosnian Partisan poet Skender Kulenović, writing in the Partisan newspaper *Oslobođenje* (Liberation) in early 1944, acknowledged that Pozderac's role had been decisive and that 'that which first moved the Krajina Muslims to shift from vague sympathy to active struggle was the entry of Nurija Pozderac into the People's Liberation Movement, and his election as vice-president of AVNOJ. That expressed itself not only in ever-greater assistance to our army, but also in the Muslims' ever stronger bond of blood with the general people's struggle'.<sup>209</sup> Muslim support for the Partisans, and hence the Partisans' ability to take control of Bosnia, hinged upon the collaboration of members of the Muslim elite.



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## THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT UNDERGROUND

c. APRIL 1941–APRIL 1943

*The underlying conflict of interests which generates collaboration and resistance has often existed as a result of internal civil strife. But it is especially marked in confrontations between nations. For this reason the history of German rule in Europe during World War II is so well suited for the study of the two antithetic responses. And yet, despite massive literature—usually written cum ira and sine studio—we know pitifully little about the real attitudes of the subject peoples at that time. Most of them could claim both famous resisters—Jean Moulin, Josip Broz (Tito), Zoia Kosmodemianskaia—and notorious collaborators—Pierre Laval, Ante Pavelić, Andrei Vlasov. But one can hardly avoid the impression that these men and their followers were exceptional rather than typical. The behaviour of the overwhelming majority of other people probably did not fit easily into the clear-cut categories of either collaboration or resistance; it was a curious mixture of both.*

Vojtech Mastny, *The Czechs under Nazi rule*<sup>1</sup>

The Partisan guerrilla army in Bosnia arose from the predominantly Serb peasants who took up arms, under Communist leadership, against the genocidal Ustasha state. But power in a country is ultimately held by those who hold the towns. NDH control—and, through it, the control of the Axis occupiers—was concentrated in the towns, while the Communists themselves were an urban movement, both in origin and in outlook. So the political struggle for control of the towns, while initially less dramatic than the activities of the Partisan guerrilla forces, was as important for the ultimate outcome of the war. The NOP in the towns waged a campaign of agitation and propaganda among the urban population and infiltration and sabotage in the NDH bureaucracy, armed forces and organs of transport and the economy. Since non-Serbs were in the majority in the Bosnian towns, the NOP's multinational, Bosnian-patriotic banner was central to their efforts to win over the Bosnian urban population.

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Historians and chroniclers of the civil war in Yugoslavia of 1941–45 have traditionally presented it as a struggle between clearly defined camps, above all Ustasas, Chetniks and Partisans. Yet to present it this way is misleading. The struggle for Bosnia was a struggle in which identities, loyalties and roles were often blurred: underground Serb activists disguised themselves as Muslims; Muslim Partisans adopted Serb names; Ustasas became Communists; Communists became Ustasas; Partisans turned Chetnik; Chetniks worked for the Partisans; men dressed as women; women fought as men; and many activists worked for opposing sides at the same time. The mass of ordinary people in Bosnia-Herzegovina were not strongly committed to any side in the conflict, but sought above all to survive. Among the Muslims and Croats that together comprised the majority of the inhabitants of the towns and cities of Axis-occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina, even the committed supporters of the Ustasha regime and of the NOP were not rigidly distinct from one another; in many cases, they had formed part of the same general opposition to the pre-war Serbian-dominated Yugoslav regime and shared a commitment to Croatian and/or Bosnian national liberation or autonomy. Members of the two camps were linked to one another and to the same general population by ties arising from kinship, friendship, neighbourhood, business or employment activity, common schooling or other.

Consequently, the frontline between the two camps was fluid. The struggle was not simply one of insurgency and counter-insurgency, but of a struggle for influence over the general population, and over members of the two camps themselves. Individual loyalties were often uncertain, unstable or double, as the two camps infiltrated one another. NDH repression and NOP reprisals were often restrained by the need to avoid alienating the population. Gratuitous executions of NOP activists by the regime, or of captured Home Guards by the resistance, discredited the killers more than they hurt the side of those killed. Public opinion was the key battleground. Meanwhile the NOP in the occupied towns and cities worked through its members' workplaces and personal connections to infiltrate all areas of the state and the economy. They recruited, sabotaged and gathered supplies while laying the basis for the eventual subversion and overthrow of the quisling state.

### *The importance of personal connections*

Visitors to Bosnia-Herzegovina who spend any length of time in the country inevitably notice the system that dominates social life, giving order to the Bosnian world and allowing Bosnians to survive and progress in the absence of a functioning state and economy: the system of 'connections' (*veze*). Whereas in the modern capitalist world the political, professional and personal spheres are ideally considered distinct, in the pre-capitalist Balkans their borders range from blurred to non-existent. Local officials and politicians use their positions and influence to find jobs for family members, do favours for friends and obtain goods and services not provided by the state. These patronage networks cut across political dividing lines to determine events in any number of ways. In the conditions of political confusion, socio-economic breakdown and general chaos and insecurity created by the Axis invasion, the establishment of the NDH and the uprising, the importance of patronage networks inevitably grew. Patronage networks were

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more important than political ideology in determining the actions of most individuals. Characteristic of their importance is the experience of Draginja Mikašinović, a Croat schoolteacher from Slavonia who in 1944 became secretary of the KPJ organisation for Donji Vakuf, a small town in Bosanska Krajina. Mikašinović was sent to Donji Vakuf by the Ustasha authorities in September 1942 and remained there throughout the war. She recalls that she relied for support in this foreign town on her Muslim landlady; upon a Serb colleague; and upon the municipal president Smail Tupara, also a Muslim, who had a son in the Partisans.<sup>2</sup>

The KPJ was well placed to exploit these networks, for its membership cut across the national and urban-rural borders to give it connections in all places. Serb Communists who had come from the villages to the towns had the familial connections back home that gave the KPJ leadership over a large part of the rebellion; Croat and Muslim Communists had similar connections with the bureaucrats, officers and even Ustasha functionaries who served the NDH. Avdo Pirkić, a native of the northern Hercegovinian village of Oštrovac who worked in Sarajevo, received the task from the KPJ in late June or early July 1941 of returning to his home village to mobilise the local youth. Pirkić, a Muslim, worked on this together with Jure Jurić, a Croat; according to the former, 'we successfully carried out this task because we were active among the Muslim and Croat population, making use of acquaintanceships and family connections'.<sup>3</sup> Such connections were then intended to form a bridge via which the Muslim and Croat village population could be reached. The commander of the Sarajevo Oblast Staff reported on 27 August the necessity of 'linking ourselves with the Muslims of the vicinity, via the Muslims of Sarajevo born in their localities'.<sup>4</sup> A week later, the Sarajevo Staff instructed its subordinate Staffs that they must 'via the connections that we already have in the Muslim villages spread our influence to other Muslim villages'.<sup>5</sup>

The closeness of these connections was heightened by the relative social homogeneity and moderate class divide that characterised Bosnian society; the cultural and social barriers between the bourgeoisie, peasantry and proletariat were not as absolute and impenetrable as they were in the capitalist West. The KPJ was a cross-class party that drew its membership from all sections of society, from rich peasant and bourgeois families as well as from the proletariat; as Vladko Maček noted in his memoirs, Communist militancy stemmed more from the rebelliousness of young members of the middle classes than from that of the working class:

The Communist youth consisted primarily of the children of the rich and some young intellectuals, who on the whole had moderately good incomes... One of the compelling motives for the amazing expansion of Communism is, in my opinion, the marked desire of the young to emancipate themselves from the moral restraints dictated by the already established generation of society.<sup>6</sup>

Avdo Humo, the most senior Muslim Communist in Bosnia-Hercegovina, married fellow Communist Olga Ninčić, whose father Momčilo was an eminent member of the People's Radical Party and former Yugoslav Foreign Minister. Central Committee member Ivo Lolo Ribar was the son of Ivan Ribar, leader of the left wing of the Democratic Party and chairman of Yugoslavia's Constituent

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Assembly in 1921. Vladimir Velebit, a member of the Partisan Supreme Staff, was the son of a Brigadier-General of the pre-war Yugoslav Army. Members of a single nuclear family might therefore belong to two or even more antagonistic political currents; through its members the KPJ had connections among the leaderships of mainstream Croat, Muslim and Serb parties.

The personal connections that bound together Bosnians of different nationalities and political persuasions are illustrated by the case of Dušanka Kovačević, a leading KPJ activist from Banja Luka whose father was a Serb and mother a Croat. Kovačević was arrested on 28 June 1941 and placed in a police prison. Her barred window looked upon the house of the *kadi* (Islamic-law judge) Maglajlić, whose daughter Vahida was a KPJ member. As the *kadi* entered his front door, Kovačević called to him: 'Mr Kadi, please tell Vahida that Dušanka is in prison.' Pretending not to hear, the *kadi* entered his house and angrily told his daughter: 'Your friend is in prison, hurry and you'll find a place there too.' Vahida then pushed some fruit and newspapers through the prison window to Kovačević. Three hours later, the prisoner was taken to the notorious Ustasha prison known as the 'Black House' and from there to the Banja Luka castle: 'Passers-by directed strange looks at our procession—a girl in a summer dress, with sandals on her bare feet, between two gendarmes armed to the teeth.' At the castle the room of her new prison was situated beneath the quarters of mobilised Home Guards. 'Among them were many youths from Banja Luka who knew me. When taking a walk, which was permitted us, some of them greeted me, asked me whether I needed anything, sometimes threw me an apple. From them I received not a single ugly word, nor a curse, nor an innuendo.'

In prison, Kovačević received a visit from her Serb father who cried in front of her for the first time in her life and brought her fruit and cakes. Kovačević was eventually taken before a prison official who turned out to be a former school-mate. After failing to persuade her to sign a declaration that she believed in the victory of Nazi Germany over the Soviet Union, 'with two or three slaps and swearing at my Communist mother the meeting ended and he let me go'. She never saw her father again; he was forced to emigrate to Serbia where he was killed by the Chetniks, while her Croat mother was permitted to remain in Banja Luka.<sup>7</sup> Dušanka's brother Mirko Kovačević joined the Partisans and wrote the Bosnian Partisan anthem 'Through the forests and mountains of our proud Bosnia'. Mirko was killed in battle with the Ustashes at Mrkonjić Grad in August 1941. Vahida Maglajlić, the *kadi's* daughter, and Dušanka's sister Zora were killed as Partisans trying to break out of a German encirclement at Podgrmeč in April 1943; Maglajlić posthumously became the only Muslim woman to be awarded the title of 'People's Hero'.

Kovačević's account reveals much about the conditions under which the battle between the Communists and Ustashes was fought. The small number of committed members of both movements in the cities inhabited the same world, one that they shared with a much larger proportion of people, mostly Muslims or Croats, who were not politically committed to either camp. Even in a relatively large town like Banja Luka, the adherents of both were frequently acquainted, they and their families having lived side by side all their lives. Regardless of nationality, they belonged to the same world; those who served the NDH remained amenable to

the influence and appeals of their relatives, friends and neighbours who supported the NOP. It was to this uncommitted majority, ready in principle to collaborate with either side, that the NOP had to appeal if it were to win. This group included those who served the NDH as officials, Home Guards, gendarmes or even Ustasas on a purely professional or opportunistic basis, who maintained links or were related through family or personal acquaintance with members of the NOP and on whom the KPJ counted to survive as a political force in the towns and, eventually, to take power.

The overlap between those who served the Ustasas and those who served the Partisans was eventually picked up on by the Chetniks, whose propaganda lampooned the 'salon Partisans' who 'sat in the Croatian service, receiving payment from the Ustasha state and raising their right hand and shouting '*Spremni!*' ['Ready!', the Ustasha salute], while above them hangs the disgusting picture of Ante Pavelić'. Yet, continued the author, 'when they leave their Ustasha offices then in the streets and in society they become Communists, they become the greatest fighters for the justice and freedom of the people...', in contrast to the 'honourable Chetnik struggle' from the hills and forests.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, however, it was the Communist penetration of the cities of the NDH that gave them a decisive advantage over the Chetniks. For although the muscle of the Partisan movement lay in its peasant-based military units, its brain and heart lay in the urban-based KPJ. It was not in the nature of the latter to abandon the propaganda battlefield to the Ustasas and lead an entirely peasant-based resistance struggle; this would have meant cutting the links between the KPJ and the industrial working class. It would also have meant KPJ members abandoning their homes and families to the camp of the enemy. Above all, the towns were key sources of supplies, military intelligence and recruits. Finally, the towns could not easily be occupied militarily against the opposition of a hostile urban population; the political conquest of a town, including the NDH armed forces defending it, was frequently the necessary prelude to its military conquest.

### *The Ustasha-Communist overlap*

Until the Axis invasion of April 1941, the Communists collaborated with members of the HSS and JMO at the local level against the regime in Belgrade. The alliances formed in this period did not necessarily end following the invasion; members of the KPJ and HSS continued to share a commitment to Croatian self-determination and statehood; members of the KPJ and JMO continued to share a commitment to Bosnian autonomy. Until 22 June 1941, the Soviet Union strove to maintain friendly relations with Nazi Germany, breaking off relations with the exiled Yugoslav government in London and perhaps edging towards recognition of the NDH.<sup>9</sup> For all these reasons, the Croats and Muslims who joined the Ustasas' new order and those who were in the KPJ may not have viewed one another as enemies, but rather as members of different currents of the same opposition, their worlds overlapping and blending together.

In Mostar in 1936, Avdo Humo and other Communist students enlisted the help of Father Mladen Barbarić, a prominent member of the opposition whom they knew as a teacher in the Mostar gymnasium. The students needed the use of

a printing press owned by the Franciscans in order to print propaganda leaflets directed against the activities of Gajret, the Serbian-oriented and royalist Muslim cultural organisation. Father Mladen printed the leaflets for them only after the students had assured him they supported a free Croatian nation; he later became a supporter of the Ustasha regime.<sup>10</sup> In Livno immediately prior to the war, the Croat society 'Dinara' possessed both Communist and Frankist (Ustasha) currents; in 1940 conflict between them over the choice of president for the society brought its proceedings to a halt, but among the members of what was after all a single club there may have been room for the undeclared and for friendly disagreement. Subsequently, the Croat and Muslim members of the Livno Communist organisation did not readily believe the reports of Ustasha atrocities.<sup>11</sup> In Tuzla prior to the occupation, the Muslim society 'Senaat' organised frequent meetings with guest speakers who were mostly left-oriented, but on one occasion it invited Šemso Dervišević to deliver a lecture on 'how to establish the goals of autonomy for Bosnia-Hercegovina'; Dervišević turned out to be a Nazi sympathiser.<sup>12</sup>

The establishment of the Ustasha state did not mean that previously friendly Communists and Croat nationalists became enemies overnight; on the contrary, many Ustashes continued to view individual Communists as fellow travellers. In Mostar following the establishment of the NDH, Humo recalls meeting by chance Šćepo Barbarić, a student whom he knew from pre-war days to be a Frankist and who would soon be appointed Ustasha chief for the district. Barbarić greeted Humo in a friendly manner; the latter attributes this to the shared political heritage of the pre-war period.<sup>13</sup> Slavko Havić, secretary of the SKOJ in the town of Prijedor, had to resist his Ustasha friend who sought to recruit him with the words 'Slavko, our Croat time has come; join our side.' Even though Havić refused, the Ustasha did not inform on him, even though he was aware of his politics.<sup>14</sup> In the region of Zubci near Trebinje in south-eastern Hercegovina, the Serb KPJ member Jovan Ratković and his Croat or Muslim friend Fistanić had both been opponents of the Yugoslav regime, though from different ideological standpoints; following the establishment of the NDH Fistanić became gendarme commander in Trebinje and offered Ratković the position of president of the Zubci municipality, which he declined.<sup>15</sup>

Many individual Croats and Muslims were genuinely unsure whether to follow the Ustasha or the Communist path to national and social liberation. According to Sakib Hajrić of Semberija in north-east Bosnia, some Muslim Communists of this region were unsure of whether they should oppose or support the NDH, given that the new regime asserted that it was 'their' (i.e. the Muslims') state.<sup>16</sup> Čerim Imamović, a youth activist from Kotor Varoš who was close to the Communists, helped organise the Partisan uprising but then defected to the Ustashes in 1942 and fought for them on the Eastern Front. He then rejoined the Partisans in 1944 and was killed fighting for them, according to the testimony of some of his former comrades.<sup>17</sup>

The overlap between the nationalist and Communist wings of the pre-war Muslim and Croat opposition to the Yugoslav regime laid the basis, under the NDH, for the split in individual families and even individual souls between the Ustashes and the Partisans. In the village of Ripač near Bihać, an administration for the local library and reading room was established in 1936 that provided sev-

eral members of both the Ustasha and Partisan movements. A few days after the Axis invasion in April, several Serb families took refuge in the village. Among these refugees was a young Communist who preached ideas that were perhaps indicative of the widespread political confusion of the moment. He assembled a group of village youth to tell them that Yugoslavia had been betrayed by its government, but that the time was ripe for the proclamation of a 'Soviet Republic' of Bosnia, which the Germans would not attack because they had a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, while in return he suggested the Germans should be granted free passage over Bosnian territory. The youth's speech produced a lively discussion, according to Branko Bokan, a participant. When German troops arrived in the village on 13 April, members of the library greeted them with the fascist salute. When a shocked Communist member asked his colleague Huso Bišćević why he was greeting the occupier in this way, the latter replied that Nazism and Socialism were 'one and the same, this is what we've been waiting for!'; he had held these views since the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

With the establishment of the NDH, Bišćević was appointed to the municipal government. The library and reading-room administration had also included three members of the prominent *beg* family Ibrahimpašić. Two of these, Ahmet and Džafer Ibrahimpašić, also entered municipal government under the Ustashes, Ahmet having been a member since before the war. With the blessing of the Ustashes, Ahmet led armed Croats and Muslims during the April War in the disarming of units of the Yugoslav Army; he was nevertheless to collaborate with the NOP throughout the war until executed by the Germans in 1945 along with two other members of his family. Džafer was, by contrast, sentenced to a long prison term after the war for his role in the Ustasha genocide. A fourth member of the pre-war library and reading-room administration was Bokan, a Serb.<sup>18</sup> The latter, a Partisan from 1941, would later in life throw himself into the propaganda battle accompanying the wars of Yugoslav succession in the 1990s by cataloguing and publicising Ustasha crimes against the Serbs.<sup>19</sup>

The interconnectedness of the pro-Ustasha and pro-Communist circles inevitably gave the KPJ a considerable advantage in underground activity, for many Ustashes and their collaborators were unaware of or unconcerned by the subversive activities of their friends and relatives. In Rogatica in East Bosnia, the brother of SKOJ member Ahmet Jamaković became an Ustasha officer; Ahmet followed him into the Ustashes to act as a KPJ spy. He provided the Staff of the Romanija Detachment with military information about the Ustasha and Home Guard forces in Rogatica and restrained somewhat the Rogatica Ustashes in their persecution of the local Serbs.<sup>20</sup> In Mostar, SKOJ member Hana Kolukčija took advantage of the fact that the Ustasha Youth leader Ico Omeragić was in love with her. Through him, she donned an Ustasha uniform and entered the Ustasha headquarters, acquiring information on planned Ustasha actions against the Communists which she then passed on to the latter.<sup>21</sup> In Jajce following the occupation, the Communist sympathiser Mustafa Popara listened to Radio Moscow in his basement and spread its propaganda messages throughout the town. The authorities did not suspect him because his older brother was an Ustasha.<sup>22</sup>

In Bihać, the KPJ enjoyed relative freedom of activity in the period from the invasion until 22 June 1941.<sup>23</sup> KPJ member Perica Diklić had a brother who was



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friendly with the captain of the Bihać gendarmerie before the Axis invasion. The gendarme captain had informed the town's Communists of measures being taken against them by the Yugoslav regime. As a Croat, he retained his post under the NDH and informed Diklić and his comrades of similar measures on the part of the Ustasas. The Bihać district chief Vičko Pračevac was also a source of information for the KPJ.<sup>24</sup> In nearby Ripač the schoolteacher Atif Zametica, through his acquaintance with Ivan Frković, commander of the village gendarmerie, obtained information that he supplied to the Communists.<sup>25</sup> In June 1941 the Ustasas failed to arrest the leading Communist activists in the villages of Šatorovići and Osovo near Rogatica in East Bosnia; the latter had been warned in time by a sympathetic policeman and by a SKOJ member whose brother was the Ustasha *logornik* for Rogatica.<sup>26</sup> In Bosanski Novi, the district superintendent's son Kazo Đurak was a member of SKOJ. At the end of 1941 he learnt from his father that the police were preparing to arrest NOP activists in the town. On his warning, these activists then fled the town to avoid capture.<sup>27</sup> The NOP supporter Dragojlo Markić escaped from a prison train travelling from Jezero in 1941 with the assistance of two Home Guards with whom he had served in the Yugoslav Army.<sup>28</sup>

The moral ambiguities of this situation, in which the Communists enjoyed a degree of safety thanks to their personal connections among the authorities, was not lost on the former. Olga Marašović, who became secretary of the local committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo in March 1942, went to Tuzla in early July 1941 to inform the Tuzla Communists of the necessary preparations for resistance. She recalls being in a dilemma as to where to spend the night following her arrival. 'I had many friends and acquaintances in Tuzla from my studies. However, they were all my political fellow-travellers and consequently certainly under police surveillance. Such hosts were not what I wanted. Staying in the hotel was similarly not secure. It was frequently subjected to police raids, and I had with me compromising materials'. Consequently: 'I decided that my host should be the family of the Ustasha colonel Stipković. His wife was my *kuma*. The friendship of my parents with that family dated to before the war in Bijeljina. Although my brother was tried as a Communist, that friendship was not clouded, as was entirely to have been expected at that time in every small-town setting'. Marašović was in fact embarrassed by the enthusiasm with which her Ustasha hosts greeted her upon her arrival:

They greeted me exceedingly warmly. To demonstrate their hospitality even more fully, they took me to dinner at the Hotel Bristol. Such warmth did not delight me, but I could not refuse the invitation. At the hotel where they took me we were joined by several other Ustasha officers who surrounded me with importunate attention, presumably in the belief that they would therefore give their senior, and my host, an indication of their great respect.<sup>29</sup>

Some Ustasas and other quislings were themselves willing collaborators with the NOP, because of both their personal connections and uncertain ideological loyalties. Meho Kafedžić, a seasonal worker and political leftist, became Ustasha *tabornik* in the village of Brdo in Hercegovina but maintained links with the KPJ organisation in Trebinje. He pursued a conciliatory policy towards the Communists and Serbs, failing to confiscate Serb village weapons and securing the release of an NOP activist arrested by the police. On the day the uprising began he

joined the rebels.<sup>30</sup> The Ustasha militia in the region of Bosanska Gradiška in 1941 recruited both Serbs and Communists who would collaborate with the Partisans, transporting them in their military vehicles from place to place.<sup>31</sup> Partisans of the Gorki Battalion, during their operation to capture the town of Šipovo in Bosanska Krajina in late August 1941, encountered no resistance from the Muslim militia of the village of Duljci, which raised a red flag over the village to welcome their arrival. This gesture was the work of a villager who had been in close contact with the Jajce Communist Jusuf Filipović prior to the war.<sup>32</sup> In the town of Maglaj in central Bosnia, the authorities established a militia immediately prior to the uprising. The KPJ had many sympathisers in the militiamen among whom it agitated, destroying the fighting morale of the militia and facilitating the capture without resistance of Maglaj on 24 August.<sup>33</sup>

In the municipality of Divin in Hercegovina in May 1941, the Communist Halid Čomić was appointed Ustasha chief for the municipality with the support of local Serbs and Muslims. Čomić sabotaged the Ustasha genocide in the municipality and ensured that Ustasha units behaved correctly, even distributing weapons to the local Serbs in order to confiscate them again, in order to show the authorities he was carrying out the task of disarming the Serb population. According to the testimony of the Sarajevo Chetnik Dejan Kočović: 'There were many cases of Muslim peasants saving their neighbours. Some even took the local militia into their own hands in order to prevent the arrival of Ustashas in the village, such as Halid Čomić.'<sup>34</sup> When two lorries full of blood-soaked Ustashas arrived in July from the nearby village of Berkovići, having engaged in the killing of Serbs there, Čomić denied them entry into the village of Divin. He showed them the document proving his position as local Ustasha chief, bearing as it did Pavelić's signature: 'Truly, this time that signature was of golden value—both lorries full of Ustashas turned and left'.<sup>35</sup> Following this triumph, Čomić set up a commission made up of both Serbs and Muslims that disarmed those Muslims who had been guilty of plundering Serb property. On hearing that a band of Ustashas was planning to rob a Serb house, Čomić sent four of his own Ustashas, 'in whom I had full confidence', to disarm the band. When Ustashas arrested sixty Serbs in the village of Meka Gruda, Čomić used his connections to have them released: he enlisted his fellow Communist Sajto Bajramović who enjoyed close relations with municipal governor Arif Avdić, who in turn secured the release of the Serbs via the district superintendent Marko Šakić. The latter was a defender of the Serbs of his district and collaborated with Čomić to ensure their safety and keep out Ustashas from other areas.<sup>36</sup>

Through close and patient work among both Serb and Muslim communities in the face of state-organised chaos, Čomić built the foundation for their future cooperation in the NOP. As in other areas, in the area of Fatnica and Divin the NOP grew because it worked through the apparatus of the NDH, not simply against it. It was not, however, possible for a double agent such as Čomić to play the part of local Ustasha chief without occasionally crossing the line. In June when a rebel force attacked the village of Divin without informing him, Čomić was forced to repel the attack. While spending the night with a group of Serb rebels in a Serb village in order to establish the basis for cooperation, Čomić felt compelled to warn them that 'if anything happens to me, you will answer to the

Party, and perhaps also to the Ustasas'. When the rebels eventually succeeded in capturing Divin on 28 August they almost killed Čomić, but Lale Šakota, an octogenarian Serb villager who remembered his efforts to protect the Serbs, intervened on his behalf and Čomić was eventually rescued by some of the more sympathetic rebels, while the Muslims of the locality were put to the sword.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, as the Serb rebellion grew increasingly pogromist in its attitude to the Muslims, Čomić was eventually forced to retreat with his Ustasha militia to territory securely under Ustasha control.<sup>38</sup>

The most spectacular example of Communist infiltration of the Ustasha movement during the early months of the war occurred at Bukinje, near the Croat mining settlement of Husino near Tuzla, scene of a legendary Communist miners' uprising in 1920. Here an Ustasha municipal force (*tabor*) of ten men was established by Husino's Communists in July under the guidance of the Oblast Staff for Tuzla. Posing as Ustasas, the ten Croat Communists were distributed uniforms and weapons and garrisoned in Bukinje. On 18 August, the entire 'Ustasha' force went over to the Partisans, taking with it all its weaponry and equipment.<sup>39</sup> This act was celebrated by the Provincial Committee in its proclamation of August 1941 to the 'Peoples of Bosnia Hercegovina', when it informed the 'brother Croats':

Have you not heard that at the purely Croat village of Husino near Tuzla, an entire Ustasha force, with the chief at its head, called the peasants to arms and joined the People's Liberation Army? The purely Croat locality of Husino is known for the famous 1921 [*sic*] strike of the Husino miners. It could not turn its back on and spit upon its glorious Croat tradition, but stood to defend its Croat honour, its freedom and its independence.<sup>40</sup>

The Croat patriotic rhetoric with which the Provincial Committee spoke of this act of defection was thus scarcely less pronounced than that of its Ustasha opponents, stressing as it did the 'glorious Croat tradition' of a 'purely Croat locality', and its 'Croat honour'. Both Communists and Ustasas were appealing to the same Bosnian Croat constituency, even to the same figures of the military, police, bureaucracy and political organisations of the NDH. All but one of the Husino 'Ustasas' died fighting as Partisans during the war.

Loyal NDH officials could not be sure who was a loyal Home Guard and who was an NOP sympathiser, just as KPJ leaders could not be sure who was a loyal Serb Partisan and who was a Chetnik sympathiser. This was highlighted by two successful ruses carried out by Partisans posing as Home Guards in early 1942. On 5 January 1942 a group of ten such Partisans of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment, wearing Home Guard uniforms and under the leadership of Ivica Marušić-Ratko, attempted to board an armoured train travelling from Prijedor, of the kind that was used to patrol the Bihać-Prijedor railway line. After capturing a guard-post on the railway line, they forced the guard to contact the authorities in Prijedor to inform them that a group of Home Guards had escaped a rebel attack and to ask for assistance from the armoured train. The train stopped to let them on board and eight succeeded in boarding, but the Partisans failed to enter the locomotive and the fireman realised what was happening and reversed the train to take it back to Prijedor at full speed. The use of the word 'comrade' by one of the Partisans as he boarded the train may have alerted the Home Guards to their identity and a struggle ensued, resulting in casualties on both sides (the Partisans reported three

Home Guards and one Partisan killed, while the Home Guards claimed it was two Partisans and no Home Guards). The Partisans succeeded in disarming the twenty real Home Guards aboard and subjected them to a lecture on the goals of the NOP, before evacuating the train with the armaments they had captured and the body of their fallen comrade, jumping out into the soft snow as the train slowed down to enter Prijedor. At Prijedor railway station the panic-stricken driver jumped out and shouted: 'Watch out! The train is full of Partisans!', at which point the railway station emptied. Home Guard forces surrounded the train and kept it under watch for a long time until they were sure it was empty. The NDH military ceased thereafter to use armoured trains to patrol the line.<sup>41</sup>

The second such ruse occurred six weeks later in a different part of Bosnia when a similar drama of false identities was enacted. Tifa Lipničević, the twenty-year-old secretary of the Bijeljina Local Committee of the KPJ, was a highly effective undercover NOP agent in occupied Bijeljina. Dressed in the traditional Muslim women's costume, she was able to operate unmolested by the authorities for a while. She and her cousin Sena Resić, a prominent feminist, were held in enough regard by the regime for the Ustasha *tabornik* of Bijeljina, Murat-beg Pašić, to invite them to his home in an unsuccessful effort to recruit them. Lipničević was eventually arrested, at which point the Staff of the Majevisa Detachment planned her rescue. It was carried out on the night of 19–20 February by a group of eleven KPJ and SKOJ members—some as young as eighteen—dressed as Home Guards. The group entered the town undetected, entered the prison, disarmed the guards and escaped with Lipničević. In this case, however, the NOP triumph was short-lived. Lipničević's rescue coincided with the surprise Chetnik attack on and massacre of the Majevisa Detachment Staff at Vukosavci in February 1942. Lipničević was therefore left without her protectors and was soon rearrested by the Ustashes and executed. Seven of her eleven rescuers were subsequently killed during the war.<sup>42</sup>

German efforts at repression consequently suffered from uncertainty over who precisely among the Croats and Muslims were enemies and who were genuine collaborators. When in early 1943 the Germans interrogated the captured Zenica Communist Rifat Čolaković to determine who his comrades were, Čolaković provided them with a list of genuine Ustashes and their supporters in Zenica. When the Germans began arresting these individuals, it brought them to the verge of armed confrontation with the Zenica Ustashes.<sup>43</sup> On other occasions, however, it was the Communists who fell foul of the confusion over who was an ally and who an enemy. At its meeting on 23 June 1941 the Provincial Committee learnt that two of its high-ranking Communists, Vaso Miskin-Crni and Milutin Đurašković, had been arrested following a particularly crass attempt to arrange an act of sabotage. They had met a railway official at Ilijaš railway station who was an acquaintance of theirs and tried to persuade him to arrange a crash for a train transporting German troops; the official promptly reported them to the police.<sup>44</sup>

## *The limits of Ustasha repression*

The Ustasha state was from its birth a ramshackle edifice, a feeble caricature of a genuine totalitarian state. The small minority of committed Ustashes headed a

bureaucracy largely inherited from the Yugoslav state, filled with Serbs and other politically unreliable elements that could not be weeded out overnight. Even in 1943 Serbs had a majority of seats in the Sarajevo city council, including the position of deputy mayor.<sup>45</sup> The new officials appointed by the Ustasha regime, for their part, were hastily chosen from a small pool of candidates from among the Croat and Muslim communities of their respective localities, and were often no more efficient or loyal. In the town of Gračanica in northern Bosnia, the district superintendent Adem Osmanbegović was an opponent of the Ustasas; he obstructed violence against Serbs and Jews and arranged the release of imprisoned Communists, which eventually resulted in his dismissal in August 1941.<sup>46</sup> In the north-west Bosnian town of Prijedor in 1941, the district superintendent, whose wife was a Serb, collaborated with the KPJ. He provided the KPJ with a list of its activists that the Ustasas were planning to arrest, claiming that 'they are being arrested by the Ustasas, not by the district government'. Thus he helped them avoid capture.<sup>47</sup> The Partisans were, it was reported early the following year, able to enter Prijedor freely to buy essential goods.<sup>48</sup> Zenica workers demonstrated against the Ustasha regime on May Day in 1941, but when the Ustasas responded by arresting forty of them the district superintendent intervened to secure their release.<sup>49</sup>

In the town of Stolac in Hercegovina, the district superintendent Safet Šefkić was an NOP sympathiser and the municipal administration was riddled with NOP agents. The Stolac NOP therefore had access to all police reports and secret acts of the authorities as well as to material supplies such as food, petrol and weapons belonging to various branches of the municipal government. The NOP had a large degree of control over the municipality's electricity works, postal service, court and public transport. Even the gendarmerie was infiltrated by the NOP, with gendarme captain Josip Družijanić supplying weapons to the NOP. When a defeated Muslim Partisan unit, the Mustafa Golubić Company, took refuge in the village of Basiliji in the spring of 1942 it was shielded from attack by Šefkić and Družijanić. Šefkić later arranged to have the Mustafa Golubić Company registered as a 'Muslim Chetnik' unit. In this way the village of Basiliji became a Partisan base and centre of Communist activities, all the while enjoying the protection of the Stolac municipal authorities.<sup>50</sup> Šefkić eventually joined the Partisans in January 1944.<sup>51</sup>

In the town of Bosanska Dubica in north-west Bosnia, the district superintendent Zdravko Filipović was, according to one Ustasha source, an enemy of the Ustasas who 'still today gathers around him all the former Serbs who were drinkers of Croat blood', while treating 'the Ustasha Camp as though it did not exist'. Filipović cold-shouldered Ustasha officials and intervened to release Communists and Serbs from prison until he was eventually removed from his post. The Ustasha Camp in Bosanska Dubica reported that 'this Camp is convinced that, because of the neglect and sabotage of the former district superintendent Mr Filipović, the Communists were so well protected that they were able to work freely in Bosanska Dubica itself. Given this great freedom, Communists came also from other places in the vicinity and together they made plans and carried out Communist propaganda-activities'. Filipović was allegedly assisted in this by the town's chief of police, Halid Hadžić, described by an Ustasha agent as 'a very

immoral person; a pro-Communist drunk who under the previous regime was a Great Serb'.<sup>52</sup> A group of Ustashes attacked his headquarters and beat him up in December 1941, but local gendarmes and Home Guards sprang to his defence and drove the Ustashes away.<sup>53</sup> Filipović and Hadžić were nevertheless forced to flee the town. On 28–29 March 1943, the Germans arrested seven NOP sympathisers in Bosanska Dubica: these included Home Guard Lieutenant Muhamed Redžić, 'because', in the words of an NDH official 'he informed the Partisans of all movements, both of our and of the German army'; and the Ustasha Youth officer Mate Filipović, 'because he, in the company of persons suspected of Communism, celebrated the fall of Stalingrad, and repeated the celebration on the occasion of the German withdrawal from the city of Kharkov'.<sup>54</sup>

On other occasions, however, the Ustashes' problems with their officials arose from sheer incompetence, brutality and corruption rather than pro-NOP sympathies. In Drvar, when an Ustasha official named N. Kuharski was sent 'to put the conditions there in order so far as was possible', he 'happened by chance upon thirty-five Ustashes who were unorganised and somewhat self-willed'; when he recruited them into the administration 'they were more or less of greater harm to the standing of the Croatian government than of benefit'. A police investigation found that Kuharski himself, by 'seizing a large sum of money from the Greek Easterners [i.e. the Serbs] and persecuting and killing them, helped provoke the rebellion of the Greek Easterners in Drvar and its surroundings, whence it spread further'.<sup>55</sup>

The efficiency of the NDH's organs of repression in practice scarcely correlated with the totalitarian ideology of the Ustashes. In the first months following the launch of Operation Barbarossa, such prominent Communists as Provincial Committee Secretary Iso Jovanović, Sarajevo Local Committee Secretary Lepa Perović, Provincial Committee member Vaso Miskin-Crni and Local Committee members Milutin Đurašković and Nisim Albahari were arrested and held at the Orthodox theological seminary the Ustashes had converted into a prison. The success of the Communists in escaping, despite their amateurism and incompetence, gives an indication of the quality of Ustasha security. As Olga Marašović recalls:

Comrades were not equipped for this kind of action, effective weapons were lacking and the imprisoned comrades were not informed of the action so that they could play their part in its execution. The strength and distribution of the prison guard was not known; it was not known in what room the imprisoned comrades were held. Yet these were all elementary requirements for the successful execution of the plan.<sup>56</sup>

In the event, the imprisoned comrades Jovanović, Miskin-Crni, Đurašković and Albahari organised their escape independently, preempting the incompetent attempt being planned by their comrades on the outside. The escape succeeded because Albahari befriended one of the prison guards, whom he had known before the war and who allowed him to wander unobserved around the prison; Albahari found a hole in the cellar through which he and his comrades later escaped.<sup>57</sup> Thus the one-eyed triumphed over the blind. As for Perović, she escaped later by jumping out of her first-floor window at 5 a.m. and was whisked away by a comrade to a safe place.<sup>58</sup> This pattern was repeated time and time again. Marašović, a later Secretary of the Sarajevo Local Committee, was arrested in April 1942. When

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tortured she simulated a mental breakdown and was sent to hospital, where she was befriended by a male nurse, an ethnic Serb, who helped her to escape through the window. However, for his role in her escape the nurse paid with his life.<sup>59</sup>

The Ustasha regime began a full-scale assault on the Communist movement following the start of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941. From then until the end of the war the citizens of towns across Bosnia-Herzegovina were subject to periodic arrests. The regime's dependence on the goodwill of the Croat and Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina nevertheless tempered their brutality towards Croat and Muslim Communists, for many influential citizens had children or relatives in or close to the KPJ. Vinko Markotić was one of a group of Communist youth arrested in Bihać on 22 June. He recalls that Ustasha functionaries visited them in prison and offered to release them on condition that they actively involved themselves in the Ustasha movement. The young people of Croat and Muslim nationality were eventually released from prison under pressure from the Bihać citizenry and placed under house arrest; those of Serb nationality had already been executed.<sup>60</sup> In Sarajevo, the chief of police Petar Petković attempted to enlist the parents of students released from prison in ensuring that they would cease all activity on behalf of the KPJ. Release from prison was made conditional upon a written parental guarantee.<sup>61</sup>

In the town of Bijeljina in north-east Bosnia, a group of fifteen mostly Muslim Communists were arrested by the Ustashas in August and transported to the concentration camp of Sremska Mitrovica, but in the face of public pressure from the Muslim citizenry of both Bijeljina and Sarajevo they were soon told that 'the Poglavnik himself had ordered their release'. The camp officers informed them:

We understand that you too, as Croats, were oppressed and dissatisfied with your position and were forced to struggle for better economic conditions, but now you are equal and will feel all the munificence of the new authorities, and will yourselves be convinced that there is no justification for fighting against your fellow Croats, who deem you Muslims to be flowers in our garden.

The prisoners were invited to join the Ustashas and released ten days later.<sup>62</sup> In Zenica, the arrest of about thirty Communists in December 1941 and January 1942 sparked days of demonstrations and the intervention of prominent citizens with the authorities, resulting in the eventual release of all the prisoners but one, who perished in the death-camp of Jasenovac.<sup>63</sup>

The citizenry of the town of Jajce demonstrated exceptional solidarity in the face of Ustasha terror. The Axis attack on the USSR was followed by the arrest of a large number of Jajce Communists and other citizens suspected of harbouring anti-fascist sympathies. The following month the Doglavnik Ademaga Mešić summoned to Sarajevo all former Muslim landowners, informing them that they were entitled to the return of land taken from them under the agrarian reforms of the Yugoslav Kingdom. Among those who attended the summons was Fahrrija Fahrbeć Filipović, whose son Jusuf Filipović was a senior local Communist and was among those arrested. Filipović senior used the occasion of his meeting with the Doglavnik to present a petition signed by about eighty Jajce citizens demanding the release of those imprisoned. Mešić responded positively to the petition and gave Filipović a letter for the Great Župan recommending that they should be



released. However, on the decision of the Ustasha police chief this did not take place. Following a further demonstration of the citizenry before the district chief, the imprisoned people were all released, except for Jusuf Filipović, who passed through several prisons and was eventually executed at a Wehrmacht camp in Norway in October 1943.<sup>64</sup>

The Muslim Communist Muhidin Kadrić was, however, among those arrested by the Ustashes in Jajce and released following the intervention of prominent Muslim townsmen, thanks to the fact that his father was a *hodža* and eminent citizen of the town. Kadrić then rejoined the NOP and was killed as a Partisan in 1943.<sup>65</sup> On 22 February 1942 another group of NOP sympathisers was arrested and beaten and tortured by the Ustashes, but the intervention once again of prominent Jajce citizens led to their release in November 'due to a lack of evidence'. The police had discovered a hand-grenade at the workshop of the tailor and NOP agent Naim Hrgić, but at his trial the Home Guard Mirko Čermak intervened on his behalf: 'He stated that the grenade was his, maintaining that it had by chance remained behind while he was at Hrgić's having his uniform repaired. This declaration of Čermak's sounded plausible to the Ustasha police.' Most of the released NOP sympathisers subsequently resumed their resistance activities.<sup>66</sup>

In the region of Zenica and Travnik in January and February 1943, when the Germans imprisoned about five hundred local citizens and NOP supporters and held them in the Zenica prison, local Ustasha officials intervened on behalf of the latter. The Travnik Ustasha officer Petar Paradžik appealed to his allies in Zagreb to ease conditions for the prisoners and send them some reassurance. Consequently, an Ustasha official was sent from Zagreb to Zenica and, in the company of Paradžik, addressed the prisoners, calling them 'brother Croats' and reassuring them that the Ustasha authorities were doing all they could to intervene with the Germans on their behalf.<sup>67</sup>

Individual Ustasha policemen were not efficient state servants but hastily recruited individuals with little confidence in the regime or belief in its politics, frequently unwilling to err on the harsh side for fear of the consequences. Mahmut Bušatlija-Buš, a Communist and the son of a *beg*, was arrested in Maglaj in 1941 during preparations for the uprising, but bluffed his way out of police custody by claiming to be the son of a rich Muslim who had come to the town to buy a house.<sup>68</sup> Nihad Kulenović, whose apartment in Sarajevo was a centre for NOP activities, on one occasion avoided imprisonment by pretending to the police who had arrested him that he was a relative of Džafer Kulenović, Deputy Prime Minister of the NDH.<sup>69</sup> In Tuzla, the Croat Communist Ludmila Pandža worked during 1941 in the telephone centre and reported to the Tuzla Local Committee what was being said via telephone and telegraph. She was able to warn her comrades in advance of police plans to arrest them. When she was finally arrested, Pandža furiously insisted that she was a Croat, that her father was a loyal Croat, that she was a member of the Croat choir and that she had never heard of the Communists. So convincing was her bluff that she was released after three days.<sup>70</sup> In the Croat village of Ravno in Hercegovina, the arrested Croat Communist Vidao Vlahinić told his captors to their faces: 'I am a bigger Croat than you and all those who are with you'. He was released and allowed to return home.<sup>71</sup> In Kulen Vakuf the Ustasha captain Vladimir Veber freed Communist prisoners



whenever possible on the intervention of their families.<sup>72</sup> In Banja Luka the senior Muslim Communist Osman Karabegović was arrested by the police on 22 June 1941. Since the Ustasha Commissioner for Banja Luka was absent, however, they soon released him.<sup>73</sup> Karabegović escaped to serve as Political Commissar for the Partisan Staff for Bosanska Krajina.

The most significant example of the failure of Ustasha repression in the face of public opposition is, however, probably provided by the trial of thirty-nine suspected NOP activists, mostly Muslims and Serbs, from Brčko in October 1942. They were part of a large group of suspected NOP supporters arrested in Brčko at the start of January and sent to Jasenovac. Vladimir Sabolić, the Great Župan of Posavje and consequently the governor of that part of north-east Bosnia, appears to have been unhappy with these arrests from the start, and in April he wrote to the police authorities in Zagreb that 'among the Croat inhabitants of Brčko and particularly among the Muslims who comprise a majority there, it would make a favourable impression if some of the less guilty and the younger ones be released', but nothing appears to have come of this initiative.<sup>74</sup> Several of the prisoners remained at Jasenovac and met their doom, but in the face of protests from prominent members of the Brčko elite—including members of the Muslim Legions, among them Major Hadžiefendić himself—thirty-nine were transported to Zagreb to stand trial.

The Ustashas had hoped that by transporting them away from their locality they would deprive them of public support, but relatives of the prisoners and prominent Brčko citizens and lawyers mobilised to defend them, travelling to Zagreb to lobby for their release. To achieve this, the lobbyists took advantage of their personal connections with members of the regime. Thus one of the prisoners, the Serb Jelenka Vočkić, was a school friend of Aida Kulenović, daughter of Džafer Kulenović, Deputy Prime Minister of the NDH. Aida succeeded for a while in persuading her father to intervene on Vočkić's behalf, though Džafer subsequently withdrew his intervention when he became convinced that the latter was indeed guilty. Vočkić's brother Joco, while lobbying to garner the release of his sister and the other prisoners, enjoyed the protection of his school friend Stjepan Vujić, chief of the UNS in Sarajevo. The mother of the prisoner Tamara Begović contacted the German Ambassador to claim that her daughter had German blood in her veins, thus securing the attendance of the Ambassador's representative at the trial.<sup>75</sup>

The trial of the Brčko thirty-nine took place in October 1942. The prisoners' lawyers rejected a compromise solution whereby the Muslims prisoners would have been released without trial, as this would have left the Serb prisoners in the lurch; they therefore insisted that all the prisoners be tried together. The months of lobbying by relatives and supporters paid off and the court was inclined to acquit most of the prisoners, but was instructed by the authorities to make an example of at least some of them. Three Serb prisoners were therefore arbitrarily singled out and sentenced to death. Tamara Begović, the prime suspect during the trial, of mixed Muslim and Croat descent and the daughter of a gendarme sub-lieutenant, herself badly tortured by the Ustashas during interrogation, responded to the verdict by bursting into tears and asking the court: 'Where is the justice in that? Why don't you convict me instead of Gojaković, who is the father of five

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children and a practically illiterate person?'—meaning that as an illiterate he could not possibly have played a significant role in subversive activity.<sup>76</sup>

Two of the others acquitted, eighteen-year-old Jelenka Vočkić and sixteen-year-old Džemila Ajanović, a Serb and a Muslim respectively, swore they would not leave the courthouse alive if the convicted men were executed. Džemila's sister Šuhreta, who was one of the lobbyists for the accused, later recalled:

I admit that if they had convicted a couple of Muslims as well, I should have ceased further to participate in this activity, for I was wholly overwhelmed, but when they chose only three Serbs to convict, I found that terrible. It seemed to me as if I had once again only saved Muslims, and that sense of justice and honour gave me strength once again to do something more; if I did not succeed, I should have had at least a clean conscience that I had tried everything.<sup>77</sup>

The lobbying was continued and the three death sentences were commuted to long prison terms 'by the mercy of the Poglavnik'. The Ustasha attempt to destroy the Communists of Brčko therefore ended in failure, though both Tamara Begović and Jelenka Vočkić subsequently perished in the People's Liberation Struggle.<sup>78</sup>

### *Women in the NOP*

In the occupied towns and cities, the role of women in the resistance to the regime was necessarily central. The underground NOP was spearheaded by women, for as male Communists left the cities and towns to assume leadership roles in the Serb rebellion in the countryside, the importance of the female Communists who remained behind to lead the urban underground NOP increased. For example, by the middle of August 1941 the Banja Luka Local Committee of the KPJ was effectively a female body, consisting of Jovanka Čović-Žuta as Secretary, Zaga Umičević-Mala as Secretary of the SKOJ, Dušanka Kovačević, Rada Vranješević and Rahmija Kadenić.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, women more generally were in the forefront of popular protests against the policies of the Ustasas and the occupiers. The food shortages caused by the rebellion in the countryside; the arrest of NOP activists who were often virtually children in terms of age and naivety; the persecution of Serb and Jewish neighbours and pillaging of their shops—all amounted to a direct attack on the families and livelihoods of women of all nationalities.

In Mostar in December 1941 Muslim women demonstrated in protest at food shortages and raided grain warehouses. The following April they demonstrated again to demand the release of local students arrested by the Italians. The latter beat the women and dispersed them, but the students were apparently released.<sup>80</sup> In March 1942 veiled Muslim women demonstrated in Banja Luka, demanding the release of their children and brothers from prison.<sup>81</sup> In June, further large-scale arrests of citizens prompted another demonstration of Muslim women, following which a group of them petitioned Ante Pavelić and Slavko Kvaternik, complaining of the activities of the Ustasha administration and demanding the release of relatives.<sup>82</sup>

Muslim women, or NOP activists dressed as Muslim women, played a particular role in NOP subterfuge, for the Muslim women's dress disguised the wearer, made

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him or her inconspicuous and was ample enough to hide illicit materials underneath. As Olga Humo-Ninčić writes:

The veiled gown, that old Muslim women's garment of dark blue homespun cloth with gold trimming, which in Mostar was of a special style known as '*roga*' or simply 'Mostar', was much used in illegal work. It still existed only in Mostar and in a few towns in Hercegovina. The masking was total. On the head was hung a kind of hood, under which was the face, in darkness and invisible. Veiled gowns were sometimes used by men. My sister-in-law Bine, like other members of SKOJ, carried under it a gun.<sup>83</sup>

In Mostar, the Party's printing press was run by Fahra Muštović, a young Muslim woman who delivered printed matter to her comrades while dressed in a veil, remaining unsuspected even by her own brother, with whom she lived and who was not himself an NOP sympathiser. The printed matter would be collected on behalf of the Party by Emina, another young veiled Muslim woman.<sup>84</sup> Indeed the veil was a particularly useful tool in Mostar, where, following the defeats of the Partisans in the spring of 1942, the initiative in the resistance passed to the Antifascist Front of Women. The latter had by this time organised a powerful network of about 2,000 women that organised demonstrations against Ustasha policy. On such demonstrations women wanted by the police avoided arrest by wearing the veil.<sup>85</sup>

Muslim women's dress was a frequent disguise for NOP agents in many other parts of Bosnia as well. In Jajce, veiled women relatives and acquaintances of NOP activists carried illicit materials under their gowns; they attracted little suspicion from the Ustasha police and were not searched.<sup>86</sup> During July 1941 the Banja Luka Communists Dušanka Kovačević, Vahida Maglajlić and Rada Vranješević regularly wore veils during their visits to Đuro Pucar-Stari, secretary of the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina.<sup>87</sup> The Communist sympathiser Antonija Henjel carried messages between the Local Committee in Tuzla and the Oblast Committee in Birač dressed in a veiled gown.<sup>88</sup> Enisa Skomp-Omerkić, a sixteen-year-old activist in Tuzla in 1941, carried illicit materials under her veil from one Communist activist to another, even though she did not normally wear a veil.<sup>89</sup> Olga Marašović wore the veil, baggy women's trousers (*dimije*) and old fashioned Muslim women's dress to avoid detection.<sup>90</sup> Lepa Perović, travelling from Sarajevo to Mostar on behalf of the Provincial Committee in the autumn of 1941, was escorted to the railway station by a female comrade, both of them dressed in Muslim women's garb.<sup>91</sup> Perović and Kosta Nađ, appointed by Tito to take charge of the NOP in Bosanska Krajina in February 1942, travelled there from Sarajevo disguised as a married Muslim couple, with Perović wearing a veil.<sup>92</sup> Thus, as Zaga Umičević-Mala says: 'Under the burkha and veil, symbols of the centuries-old oppression of women, we carried out Party tasks for the sake of the complete liberation of humankind.'<sup>93</sup>

KPJ efforts to use Muslim women's dress as a disguise were not always successful, particularly when male Communists tried to dress as women. The Communist Branko Stupar Mišo walked around Banja Luka dressed as a woman with a veil, but did not look convincing: 'When he would find himself at the home of Braco Potkonjak with some businesses, Braco's aunt Kata Baltić would needle him "How can you walk around dressed like that? Everyone can easily see that a man is hid-

ing behind that veil!’<sup>94</sup> A particularly tragic fate befell Jusuf Čevro, secretary of the Local Committee of the KPJ for Mostar. Humo recalls:

Why he dressed up in Muslim women's dress with a scarf is not clear to me. He probably thought that dressed in that way he could move into a new apartment most safely. However, he forgot to change his man's shoes and his somewhat clumsy male gait. Thus amusing, he was noticed by children in the street. One little boy shouted loudly: 'Look, Mujo has put on a burkha and is walking like an idiot! Let's follow him!' At that point, two policemen happened to come by; they were in charge of that quarter. At the children's shouting they reacted quickly and ran after the person in the scarf. Čevro was captured and executed.<sup>95</sup>

Another case of unsuccessful Communist transvestism was that of Kosta Popov, a teacher and NOP supporter who escaped from an NDH prison in Tuzla in the summer of 1941. Obtaining a woman's overdress from some of his female comrades, he put it on and attempted to walk through town so disguised. Once again, his male gait gave him away and a woman shouted out: 'There's a man in a burkha!' A crowd gathered around him and he was arrested by a passing Home Guard, though he managed to escape again and joined the Partisans.<sup>96</sup> The NDH authorities in Banja Luka responded to such use of the veil by banning it on 8 November 1941. The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Banja Luka, in a proclamation in November, cited this ban as an example of Ustasha oppression.<sup>97</sup> Yet the veil was a double-edged sword for the Partisans: when the Kozara Proletarian Company attacked the village of Čelinac on 22 February 1942, the Partisans forced Muslim women to uncover their faces for fear that some of them were Ustashes in disguise.<sup>98</sup>

### *The resistance in Sarajevo*

The Ustashes were, to all intents and purposes, an auxiliary to the Axis occupiers with minimal popular support in the country. They sought to maintain control of the towns, with their Muslim and Croat majority, while their grip on the countryside, except in Croat-majority areas, was much weaker. As the uprising spread, the towns took on the character of islands of Axis-Ustasha control in a rebel sea. This was not due to any greater support for the regime among townspeople, but was solely because the Axis, like other occupying powers in unimportant colonies, opted to retain control over the most important strongholds in the occupied territory without expending resources unnecessarily on holding down the surrounding countryside. Resistance in the towns was therefore more difficult and dangerous for the NOP, but as the nerve centres of the state the towns were important out of all proportion to the small percentage of the country's population that they comprised. There the Communist-led revolution was carried out through the fabric of Bosnian urban society.

In the Central Bosnian town of Jajce, for example, the NOP's covert centres of activity were located on the premises of businesses run by Muslims; they included a cake shop, a barber's shop and two inns. One of these inns was frequented by Home Guards, from whom it was possible to gather military information. Another centre was at the market stall of three Muslim brothers, who would buy munitions

for the NOP from sympathetic Home Guards. Muslim and Croat sympathisers meanwhile donated medical, office and other equipment to the NOP.<sup>99</sup> In the south-west Bosnian town of Livno and the surrounding villages, the NOP's centres of activity included a cake shop, two inns and the post office. The manager of the Livno telephone network was an NOP agent; through him the NOP was able to listen to Ustasha and Home Guard telephone conversations. Meanwhile, the district superintendent of Livno Tomo Maleš was himself an NOP collaborator and was eventually uncovered by the Ustashes, sent to Jasenovac and executed.<sup>100</sup> Since the NOP was capable of infiltrating the NDH apparatus at all levels, its role was particularly important in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo and in the three other principal provincial centres of Banja Luka, Tuzla and Mostar. Tuzla's unique and crucial role in the NOP will be examined in the next chapter. Here we shall consider Bosnia-Herzegovina's first and second cities, Sarajevo and Banja Luka.

Sarajevo on the eve of the uprising possessed the largest KPJ organisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with a truly multinational membership of 279, of which 93 were Serbs, 63 Muslims, 61 Jews, 54 Croats and 8 other ethnicities. Some 50 were women. In the area around Sarajevo subject to the Okrug Committee were another 81 members: 58 Serbs, 12 Croats, 9 Muslims, one Jew and one other.<sup>101</sup> The NOP developed a strong presence in the Bosnian capital, though perhaps not as strong as in Tuzla, Banja Luka or Mostar. A much larger and more diverse city, Sarajevo was home to a strong Muslim autonomist current whose leading members, Uzeir-aga Hadžihanović and Mehmed Handžić, were much more resistant than their counterparts in the provincial centres to collaboration with the NOP, while the HSS in Sarajevo (in marked contrast to the HSS in Tuzla) under the leadership of Juraj Šutej and Jozo Sunarić was pro-Ustasha rather than pro-NOP, in large part owing to the influence of the fanatically Croat-nationalist Ivan Šarić, Sarajevo's Catholic Archbishop. Furthermore, the police presence in Sarajevo was stronger and the Sarajevo Communist organisation was repeatedly crippled by arrests. On the other hand, the Ustasha regime remained weak and unpopular and hundreds of ethnic Serb officials were still working in various branches of the city administration at the time the uprising broke out.<sup>102</sup> According to one source, 260 Slovenes were expelled by the Nazis from their homes to Sarajevo, where they provided living evidence of the brutal character of the new order and readily participated in the resistance.<sup>103</sup>

A significant section of the Sarajevo populace actively supported the NOP and, as a result, the city assumed a crucial role in the Partisan struggle. Here as much as anywhere, for the KPJ's survival and success, 'it was essential to be well informed of the political orientation, familial and personal connections of people according to street, quarter and beyond', so that 'the exchange of such gathered information was constantly present in discussions between us Party members and people close to us', as one Sarajevo activist recalls.<sup>104</sup> The Ustashes were forced to tolerate a degree of popular dissidence on account of their weakness and their need to maintain a modicum of popular support. Thus the Muslim football-club 'Đerzelez', which had some Serb members and in which the SKOJ had some influence, refused to register with the Ustasha authorities, but the latter were reluctant to close down the club for fear of alienating Sarajevo's Muslims, though its administration was replaced. The SKOJ retained influence in several Sarajevo

sports clubs, including even the Catholic club 'Hrvatski Junak' ('Croat Hero') which the Ustashes attempted to turn into the sole youth club in the city.<sup>105</sup>

KPJ cells existed throughout the city under the leadership of the Sarajevo Local Committee, including at Centar, Vratnik, Bistrik, Baščaršija, Bjelave, Skenderija, Novo Sarajevo and Kovačići. Cells also existed in factories and public utilities, the most important being that of the Central Railway Workshop. Other cells existed in the board of management of the railways, the central post office, the electricity works and the municipal administration.<sup>106</sup> Koševo Hospital and other medical establishments provided many NOP sympathisers from among the doctors and nurses, who collected medical supplies for the Partisans and sheltered Communists, Serbs and Jews from the police. Doctors and chemists sympathetic to the NOP became the Partisans' chief source of medical supplies in the region and eventually many Sarajevo doctors would leave the city to serve with the Partisans.<sup>107</sup>

Activity in the wider Sarajevo region was the responsibility of the Sarajevo Okrug Committee, which had cells in the suburbs of Vogošća, Kasindol and Ilidža. Further out there were cells in the towns and villages of Visoko, Podlugovi, Breza, Vareš, Kakanj, Travnik, Romanija-Glasinac and Šatorovići near Rogatica. Each of these cells contained only a handful of members; the Local Committee itself consisted only of five or six, since only small cells could function as efficient and disciplined bodies and resist police infiltration as much as possible. These cells would, on the orders of the Local Committee, carry out actions on behalf of the movement relevant to their spheres. The KPJ web included also a larger group of sympathisers of varying degrees of involvement who were not Party members, including some of particular importance: Home Guards, doctors, chemists, printers, railwaymen and others as well as the proprietors of shops, businesses and private homes that functioned as NOP points where activists and couriers could find shelter. Members of this web conducted acts of sabotage; collected money, food, medical supplies and other goods for the Partisans; printed and distributed propaganda materials; organised aid for Jews, Muslim refugees and other victims of the war; and recruited volunteers for the Partisans and arranged their transport to rebel territory.<sup>108</sup> The cells were connected to each other and to the Partisan forces outside the city and elsewhere in the country by couriers who carried messages and orders. Inevitably the capture of a single activist, particularly a courier, could have drastic consequences for his or her comrades, but it was impossible for the Ustasha regime ever to uproot the network completely, though it attempted to do so with great brutality.

The task of suppressing the resistance was made more difficult for the Ustashes by the fact that their organs of repression themselves contained NOP sympathisers. The Sarajevo police planned to carry out the mass arrest of KPJ members and sympathisers on 22 June 1941, but the latter were tipped off by a contact working as a typist within the police who provided the Sarajevo Local Committee with lists of the well over one hundred people to be arrested. The latter were then informed so they could hide themselves. The contact in question, Ela Momčilović, was the sister-in-law of a KPJ member.<sup>109</sup> The Sarajevo policeman Arif Balta worked as an issuer of permits and identity cards. He visited a shop in Baščaršija that belonged to the Dizdarević brothers and served the KPJ. Balta was an old friend of the Dizdarević brothers and agreed to supply them with permits and

false identification papers for numerous NOP agents, until he was uncovered and arrested in April 1942 and sent to Jasenovac.<sup>110</sup>

The NOP rapidly built up a network of sympathisers among Sarajevo's Home Guards. An NOP cell was formed in the Home Guard regiment in the small town of Pale near Sarajevo in the summer of 1941. It was not a KPJ creation but was apparently founded by a Home Guard officer called Šubašić, the nephew of Ivan Šubašić, HSS politician and Tito's future partner in government; the cell was 'not exactly Communist, but certainly anti-fascist', as Kosta Nađ recalls.<sup>111</sup> Another NOP cell was established among the Home Guard pilots and mechanics at Rajlovac airport. The mechanics sabotaged aeroplanes so that they were confined to base for long periods by minor mechanical faults. The pilots deliberately missed their targets with their bombs while dropping military supplies in Partisan territory; they gave false military information to their commanders and correct military information to the NOP.<sup>112</sup> A third cell was established in the Vehicle Command Centre. The NOP furthermore had sympathisers in the Military Technical Institute and in the military base in the centre of Sarajevo. These cells and individuals provided the Partisans with weapons, munitions and military information on German, Ustasha and Home Guard numbers, armaments, positions, fortifications and movements.<sup>113</sup>

Party members working at the Military Technical Institute in 1941 collected sheet metal, wire, tin and other materials needed so that craftsmen working for the NOP could manufacture red-star emblems for the Partisans.<sup>114</sup> The same activists sabotaged the manufacture of munitions so that what was produced was faulty and unusable by the Germans.<sup>115</sup> As the uprising progressed and the Communists became more confident, they began to consider using their Home Guard sympathisers in actual military engagements. The Staff of the Romanija Detachment planned in November 1941 to use Šubašić's Home Guard cell to disarm the Pale Home Guard regiment in conjunction with a Partisan attack on the town. Unfortunately for the Partisans and their Home Guard collaborators, however, the Germans preempted the action, arresting sixty-six Home Guards and suppressing all subversive activity among the Guards. The Partisans nevertheless attacked Pale at the end of the month but, in the absence of Home Guard support, they were defeated.<sup>116</sup> The use of Home Guard sympathisers to neutralise the NDH military would nevertheless become an increasingly crucial Partisan tactic as the war went on.

In its activities within the NDH armed forces the NOP tapped into a strong current of opinion among soldiers that reflected the widespread hostility to the new regime among the Sarajevo *čaršija*. Vukmanović-Tempo reported in February: 'There is a respectable number of officers who are for Yugoslavia and the king. We have postulated that this is no reason not to approach them.'<sup>117</sup> Consequently, he and Avdo Humo established a committee for work among the Sarajevo Home Guard officers and NCOs, 'which was joined by three comrades who are known in the *čaršija* and who will satisfy all requests by these officers'. The cell had the task of establishing close personal contact with the officers, to draw from them military information, weapons and munitions and preparing their defection to the Partisans.<sup>118</sup> The committee was led by Judge Ismet Milavić, Professor Branko Galeb and the director of the City Savings Bank Julije Stipetić, each of whom had



his own circle of contacts among the Home Guards. Chief among the NOP collaborators were Colonel Sulejman Filipović and Lieutenant-Colonel Kazimir Poje. This committee provided detailed military information to the Staff of the Romanija Detachment, including the plan of the city's defences, in preparation for a projected offensive to liberate the city in 1941. Filipović was from this time a source of military information to the Partisans' General Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>119</sup> Humo sent Tito information given to him by Filipović on the organisation and strategy of the forthcoming Axis offensive against the Partisans in East Bosnia (subsequently known in Partisan terminology as the 'Second Enemy Offensive') shortly before it began.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, the Home Guard commander of the Ilidža station met a representative of the Kalinovik Detachment Staff on 22 April 1942 to provide information on the state of the local Home Guard and to arrange gifts of munitions.<sup>121</sup>

The ease with which the NOP infiltrated the NDH armed forces was a product of the ramshackle and improvised character of the puppet state and of the close family and acquaintance links between regime officials and NOP supporters. The Ustasas did not know if the soldiers they conscripted were NOP sympathisers and if they knew they often did not care. Home Guards, Ustasas, German soldiers, policemen and NDH officials frequented the tavern belonging to Mate Franičević, near the military base in the city centre, and openly discussed military and political affairs, for all to hear. Their conversations were overheard by the NOP agents present in the tavern, with the landlord Franičević and his barmaid cooperating in this covert activity. Through his connections with his clients, Franičević succeeded in getting a job for a NOP agent, Nikola Cvijetić, in the Home Guards' Vehicle Command Centre. Another NOP agent, Mirza Đukić, was called upon to perform his military service in the Vehicle Command Centre. Both Cvijetić and Đukić worked within the Centre to recruit sympathisers and collect military and other equipment for the Partisans.<sup>122</sup>

Despite these successes in Sarajevo, the first two years of the war were not propitious for the NOP, as rebel atrocities against Muslim and Croat civilians dampened the will of Sarajevans to support the resistance, while the Ustasas for their part found their feet and struck with increasing effectiveness. Vukmanović-Tempo reported to Tito in January 1942 that in Sarajevo 'a terrible reaction is reigning... we have issued orders to stop the dispatch of comrades onto the streets and to halt all work. Nevertheless, a considerable number of our comrades have fallen, particularly from the military detachments.'<sup>123</sup> A few days later, he reported further: 'Every man is being arrested regardless of whether he has legitimisation... in such a situation the movement of our comrades through Sarajevo is impossible. A considerable number of our comrades have fallen in the streets.'<sup>124</sup>

During March and April, the UNS carried out a series of mass arrests of nearly 400 suspected Communists. Three NOP agents, two of whom were couriers, willingly or unwillingly provided the UNS with the information leading to the arrests. The Sarajevo NOP was decimated: Marašović, Secretary of the Local Committee, was arrested; the other members of the Local Committee were forced to flee the city; and the NOP cells among the Home Guards were largely wiped out. UNS data on those arrested suggest a relatively even balance between Serbs, Muslims and Croats; one group of forty Communists arrested on 24 April consisted of



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sixteen 'Croatian Orthodox', thirteen Catholics, eight Muslims and three unlisted. The number of Communists active in Sarajevo was cut by more than half.<sup>125</sup> The Ustasas' anti-Communist repression in Sarajevo in this period was so intense that it appears even to have aroused the opposition of the German authorities, who sought to avoid further alienating the Muslim and Serb communities.<sup>126</sup>

In June or July 1942 the Provincial Committee sent a group of activists to Sarajevo to restore the Communist organisation, led by Avdo Humo and including Džemal Bijedić, Mladen Knežević-Traktor and Zaga Blažić-Bela. They built up a powerful network of cells across the city, but their success in this was only temporary as the Ustasas and Germans became increasingly repressive and effective in dealing with the resistance in the Bosnian capital. At the end of November 1942 a further series of mass arrests took place, catalysed by the Communist murder of the police spy Nada Vranković, that would encompass around five hundred suspected NOP activists. A total of ninety-two of these were eventually put on trial in February 1943, with a team of distinguished lawyers acting for the defence including Zaim Šarac, Ivan Šubašić, Šefkija Behmen and Jozo Sunarić. Including two additional suspects killed at this time in police custody, thirty-four of the accused were Croats, thirty-two were Muslims, twenty-six were Serbs and two were Slovenes. Only twelve of the accused were convicted and only three of them executed, but the rest were all sent to concentration camps where many of them died.

Arrests of suspected activists continued during the early months of 1943, including the arrest of eight workers of the Central Railway Workshop at the start of March. Finally in the second half of April, the arrest of about another forty NOP activists effectively broke the Communist organisation in Sarajevo. There remained only about twenty mutually unconnected Communists in the city and two cells in the Military Technical Institute and Central Railway Workshop, respectively.<sup>127</sup> It was also in the arrests of early 1943 that the Germans finally settled their score with Muhamed Mehmedbašić, one of the assassins of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914; on Gestapo orders, he was arrested by the Ustasas and tortured to death, after which his family continued to be persecuted.<sup>128</sup>

Despite the defeats suffered by the People's Liberation Movement in the first two years of its existence, public opinion in Sarajevo—particularly among the Muslims and Serbs but also among a section of the Croats—remained deeply hostile to the Ustasha order.<sup>129</sup> Todor Perović, a Chetnik agent in Sarajevo, noted in September 1942 that although the majority of the Sarajevo Croats were pro-Ustasha, 'all the rest, whether through doubting an Axis victory or whether through conviction, either sympathise with the Partisans or are themselves Communists'; as for the Muslims, although a large part of the *čaršija* was pro-Ustasha, 'all the youth and almost all the intellectuals with their entire families are either Communists or their zealous sympathisers'. Overall, 'Communist action in the town itself is extremely widespread and well-organised. Their agents are everywhere and at every location and their propaganda has found a favourable response.'<sup>130</sup>

In addition to the People's Liberation Movement and the city's powerful Muslim autonomist faction, there was a Serb nationalist current that looked towards Milan Nedić's quisling regime in Serbia and maintained links with the Chetniks in the surrounding hills.<sup>131</sup> Yet the cosmopolitan Serb population of Sarajevo was not propitious material for the Chetniks. Perović noted: 'In general, the Serb

population as a whole, with few exceptions, is so terrified that it does not resemble Serbs at all. They generally sympathise with the Partisans.' The Sarajevo Serbs were at the same time hostile to the Chetniks: 'They are openly averse to Chetnik action, criticising above all our uncompromising stance toward the Partisans on the one hand and our tolerant stance toward the occupiers on the other. They all desire our cooperation with the Partisans.' Such views arose from the fact that, in the Chetnik agent's opinion, 'they are reached only by Communist propaganda and come into contact only with the Muslim and Croat element, which contains many Communist agitators'.<sup>132</sup> Neither the Ustasha nor the Chetniks were able to put down firm roots in cosmopolitan Sarajevo, while the defeat of the city's NOP in the spring of 1943 proved to be temporary.

## *The resistance in Banja Luka*

Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina's second city and former capital, had traditionally been home to a strong and active left-wing current among the citizenry and contributed more than any other town except Sarajevo to the birth of the Bosnian Communist organisation in the 1930s. It was also a centre in the interwar period of another current, representing Serb irredentist activity, whose most notorious member was the Chetnik ideologue Stevan Moljević. All in all, it was a difficult fruit for the Ustasha regime to digest. The efforts of the regime to rename Banja Luka 'Antingrad' after Ante Pavelić and transform it into the new capital of the NDH came to nothing on account of the spread of the Serb rebellion in the surrounding countryside. Yet the Ustasha administration in the town was an exceptionally brutal one. Under Viktor Gutić and Mirko Beljan, the Banja Luka Ustasha were both enthusiastic persecutors of the Serbs and peculiarly anti-Muslim in orientation. The power struggle between Gutić's dominant faction and the Muslim Ustasha involved bloodshed on more than one occasion.

The murder of a *hodža* by Gutić's Ustasha on 1 October 1941 sparked a 500-strong anti-Ustasha demonstration. On 8 November 1941 the authorities banned the wearing of the veil by Muslim women. Consequently, the Banja Luka Muslim Resolution of 22 November, in which prominent Muslims denounced Ustasha crimes, enjoyed broad support from Croat- and Serb-oriented Muslims as well as those sympathetic to the left.<sup>133</sup> The resolution demanded that 'there be introduced true security of life and property and freedom of religion for all inhabitants of this state'.<sup>134</sup> Many Muslim and Croat citizens of Banja Luka sheltered Serbs and Jews threatened with forced exile or deportation or provided them with material assistance.<sup>135</sup> In January and February 1942, Gutić brought a battalion of mostly Herzegovinian Ustasha into Banja Luka and used them to carry out massacres in the surrounding Serb villages. Such was the disgust at this crime that even members of the Ustasha administration protested.<sup>136</sup> In March 1942 Banja Luka's Muslim mayor Bešliagić resigned in protest against the reign of Gutić's Ustasha.<sup>137</sup> In the same month the UNS chief Eugen Dido Kvaternik was forced to intervene in Banja Luka to halt possible attacks on the town's Muslim population by Catholic Ustasha.<sup>138</sup>

In this context, Communist resistance activity directed against a hated regime could be guaranteed a sympathetic reception among large sections of the popula-

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tion. There were only about twenty members of the KPJ in Banja Luka on the eve of the uprising and about half of these left the town soon afterwards to participate in the rebellion. Those that remained exercised influence out of proportion to their numbers. First, they provided a link between the townspeople and the rebels in the countryside. According to Dušanka Kovačević and Zaga Umičević-Mala, two of the principal KPJ activists in the town at this time:

Ustasha propaganda concerning the supposed Chetnik or Great Serb character of the uprising could not greatly influence the citizens of Banja Luka, for it was known that in the ranks of the rebels there were many Muslims and Croats from Banja Luka—sons, neighbours and friends with whom members of the NOP were in constant contact.<sup>139</sup>

Secondly, the actual KPJ members were simply the centre of a much larger web of NOP sympathisers. In Umičević's words:

Every member of the Party had links with a group of sympathisers. These they provided with news from the front, produced by our illegal workshop, or received from them links with liberated territory, and from them received gathered donations (aid) for Partisan units or for prisoners in Ustasha jails.

Furthermore, 'almost every family that had some of its members or friends and acquaintances in the Partisans would never refuse to do everything that was sought of it, while many on their own initiatives established links with the Partisans and carried out certain tasks according to need'. Meanwhile, teachers whose students joined the Partisans frequently covered for them before the authorities, claiming their absence from school was due to illness, thus also protecting their families from repression.<sup>140</sup>

Banja Luka citizens gathered large quantities of clothes, food, weapons, munitions, medical supplies, writing materials and other goods and sent them to the Partisans. According to Umičević, the Banja Luka NOP between December 1941 and March 1942 gathered on average 25–30,000 kunas every month for the NOP from sympathetic citizens. By comparison, the Council for Assistance of the Town Council, which included the most prominent functionaries from the Ustasha administration, gathered from 28 November 1941 to 7 March 1942 a total of 66,946 kunas, of which the bureaucracy gave 1,049 kunas and the rest came from the liquidation of the former Vrbas Banovina (the province of the former Yugoslavia that incorporated western Bosnia) and various institutions and firms.<sup>141</sup> Umičević concludes that 'it may be said categorically that the entire town was a base for supplying the NOP'. The Partisans received supplies from the hospital, municipal officers, forestry directory and other institutions. These included the Office of Colonisation, whose director Rudi Čajavec was an NOP supporter. Weapons supplied by the Home Guards, and officially intended for Croat colonists due to be settled in Serb homes, were sent by the Office to the Partisans instead—the very people for use against whom they were intended. The Office of Colonisation even used its lorries to transport the weapons to the Partisans.<sup>142</sup> One NOP supporter working in the Office would travel to the Serb villages surrounding Banja Luka, officially to determine their fitness for colonisation but in fact to gather information on Home Guard and gendarme troop numbers and dispositions, which was then sent to the Partisans.<sup>143</sup>

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The effectiveness of the Banja Luka Communist organisation (its leadership was never arrested throughout the war) and the widespread sympathy for it among the population did not prevent the authorities from making periodic large-scale arrests of NOP activists. Although the Communists could not prevent these arrests, they could take various counter-measures. Thus, on the night of 23 September 1941 NOP sympathisers at the Banja Luka electricity works arranged a power cut across the whole town, enabling a group of NOP prisoners to escape under cover of darkness from the hospital where they were being held.<sup>144</sup> In February 1942 prison guards and local Home Guards intervened to prevent Gutić's Hercegovinian Ustashes from massacring political prisoners at the notorious 'Black House' prison.<sup>145</sup> In March and June 1942, as noted above, veiled Muslim women demonstrated in Banja Luka, demanding the release of relatives from prison and an end to the regime's abuses. In this period the UNS noted the complacency of the organs of state in Banja Luka in the face of Communist activism: 'The locality of Banja Luka, to which our government is intending soon to move, is beginning to turn into a hive of Communism and all other phenomena harmful to our state.'<sup>146</sup> It reported that 'the Communist organisation has put down deep roots' in Banja Luka and that 'this was particularly the case with the younger Muslim inhabitants'.<sup>147</sup>

More than in most parts of the NDH, the oppressive character of the Ustasha dictatorship drove even members of the Croat and Muslim elites into the arms of the resistance, while the NDH's organs of repression buckled under the weight of popular discontent. The Ustasha command for the Great Župa of Sana and Luka summed up the low standing of the regime in a report describing how a minority of Muslims were 'carrying out various intrigues and propaganda activities, using various fabrications, while blaming all failings on the state'; how the Catholic Croats were 'worried about the present situation' and 'losing faith in the army'; how the Serbs were 'all opposed to the existing order'; how 'the Communists are still always essentially acting freely in the town'; and how the Home Guards were complaining 'of various acts of embezzlement and plunder on the part of the officers and NCOs as well as of their links with the rebels'. Even the gendarmes were complaining that 'all their officers are to be found in offices in the city while with them on the front were only the sergeants', and the Ustashes themselves 'were still somewhat bad-mannered and tactless, sometimes even towards our own people'.<sup>148</sup>

The Home Guard units in Banja Luka were by the end of 1941 supplying military information, munitions and medical supplies to the Partisans out of hatred of the brutal and corrupt Ustasha administration in the town.<sup>149</sup> The Home Guard Mobilisation Centre in Banja Luka was headed by Major Pauš, an NOP sympathiser with a son in the Partisans. The Mobilisation Centre would place conscripts hostile to the Partisans on the reserve list to take them out of action, list those sympathetic to the Partisans as dead in order to free them from military service, and list those really dead as alive so as to sabotage the mobilisation.<sup>150</sup> SKOJ members who were students of the Technical Faculty and of the Secondary Technical School in Banja Luka drew up a plan of all NDH garrisons in the town as well as the seats of the Ustasha military and political authorities, receiving their information from sources within the Home Guard command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Military District.

Home Guard activists in Banja Luka supplied weapons and munitions to the Partisans, both in the town and on rebel territory.<sup>151</sup> On 5 February 1942, a group of Partisans dressed as Home Guards, under the command of the Banja Luka Croat Communist Drago Mažar, entered the Home Guard barracks at Vrbanje on the outskirts of Banja Luka and disarmed the Home Guard company there.<sup>152</sup>

The extent to which the Communist and non-Communist, even Ustasha opposition to the Ustasha administration in Banja Luka overlapped and blended together is best highlighted by the case of Dragan Hadrović, a moderate Ustasha appointed by Pavelić as Grand Župan of Sana and Luka at the end of June 1942 in an effort to appease Muslim discontent. His efforts to reduce the power of the Gutić faction resulted in his swift assassination the following month. His funeral was attended by 15,000 citizens of Banja Luka, including many supporters of the NOP.<sup>153</sup> In the months that followed, hundreds of citizens were arrested, decimating but not extinguishing the Banja Luka NOP. The People's Liberation Movement had succeeded during the second half of 1942 in maintaining a web of agents and sympathisers in the population, administration and armed forces of the town.<sup>154</sup>

### *Enemy infiltration of the NOP*

Just as the NOP was able to infiltrate the organs of the NDH, so conversely the Ustashes could just as easily infiltrate the NOP. Eugen Dido Kvaternik, head of the UNS, aimed to systematically recruit agents from within the web of KPJ members and sympathisers. As he told a meeting of his officers: 'We must endeavour to recruit every Communist who during the course of his interrogation shows by his behaviour a willingness for cooperation...' <sup>155</sup> The Communists were very aware of this threat. The Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment, in its directive of 31 January 1942, informed the NOOs on its territory: 'We warn all People's Liberation Councils to be very careful of all unknown Partisans. On the territory of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Ustashes entered the village in Partisan uniforms with red stars.'<sup>156</sup> Indeed, in Kozara in July 1942 some NDH military units were reported as disguising themselves in Partisan uniforms.<sup>157</sup>

Ustasha infiltration of the Communist movement was highly successful in the Sarajevo region. An early success was the infiltration of the Zenica KPJ organisation, which prevented the Communists destroying the Zenica steelworks. The UNS agent responsible, Franjo Ler, was at the centre of Communist preparations for the attack on the steelworks and as an engine-driver was charged with the task of transporting the explosives. Instead of taking them to the site of the attack, he delivered them to the UNS office. Following the arrest of many Zenica Communists, Ler led the police to the Provincial Committee in Sarajevo, where they arrested Iso Jovanović and Lepa Perović, though Vukmanović-Tempo succeeded in escaping.<sup>158</sup> The Ustashes also planted an agent in the Staff of the Romanija Detachment, who in late 1941 provided them with detailed information on the numbers, positions and organisation of the Partisan and Chetnik forces in Romanija. In Sarajevo, the UNS succeeded in inserting an agent, Vatroslav Vrdoljak, into the Sarajevo NOP network. Vrdoljak was assigned tasks by the Sarajevo Communists while actually collecting information on them for the Ustashes. In

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March and April 1942, he helped bring about the arrest of several hundred KPJ and SKOJ members and sympathisers.<sup>159</sup>

The UNS achieved similar successes elsewhere in East Bosnia. In Brčko, an Ustasha agent became a member of the Local Committee in the spring of 1942, through whom false military information was passed to the Partisans.<sup>160</sup> In September 1942, while a group of Partisans of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade under the command of Pašaga Mandžić was present in the vicinity of Husino in an effort to replenish their ranks with new proletarian fighters, an Ustasha agent among them, Andrija Kruškovski, sabotaged their weapons and led a group of Home Guards to their base at Bukinje. Although Mandžić and most of the Partisans succeeded in fighting their way out of the encirclement, two of them were captured. Mandžić and another Partisan, Ilija Brkić, then took refuge in a nearby village at a relative of Brkić's, who promptly denounced them to the police. Surrounded again by eighteen policemen and Home Guards in the stable where they were hiding, Mandžić once more succeeded in fighting his way out while Brkić was captured. Both Kruškovski and Brkić's treacherous relative were executed by the Partisans following the first liberation of Tuzla in October 1943.<sup>161</sup> Particularly spectacular was the activity of a German double agent in Zvornik, Mark Feler, a chemist who provided the Partisans with medical supplies and subsequently with false information on Ustasha defences in the town. Following the liberation of Zvornik in July 1943, Feler formed a 'Provisional District NOO' and became its first secretary. He continued to supply the Germans with military information until 1945, and was particularly important to them in late 1944 as the Partisans invaded Bosnia from Serbia via Zvornik.<sup>162</sup>

From early 1943 the Germans and Ustashes formed bands of double agents whose purpose was to infiltrate and destroy the Partisan staffs, including the Supreme Staff. They therefore attempted to subvert the Partisans from within, just as the Communists were attempting to subvert the NDH. Yet one of these double agents was in fact a genuine Communist who passed on information on their activities to the Partisans, so that attempts to destroy the Supreme Staff came to nothing.<sup>163</sup> Eventually, the Partisan Supreme Staff specifically warned the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps: 'The enemy from Sarajevo is infiltrating its spies into our units. More alertness towards those who, in small groups or individually, come from the Home Guards and from liberated towns.'<sup>164</sup> Action was taken against this threat at every level: thus, for example, the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade sent out a warning to the municipal NOOs of Mali Radić and Suvaja in December 1943, instructing them to take preventive measures against such Ustasha infiltrators who aimed to assassinate leading NOP officials and staff members, including monitoring and verifying unfamiliar individuals and holding conferences to mobilise the population's assistance in this.<sup>165</sup> As late as February 1945, there were reports of Ustasha units whose soldiers wore the red star, enabling them to infiltrate Partisan territory.<sup>166</sup>

Serbian anti-Communists also succeeded in infiltrating the Partisans. Under the direction of German military intelligence, the Nedić regime sent its agents into East Bosnia to infiltrate Partisan units; consequently the Germans were aware, for example, on the eve of the Second Enemy Offensive that the Partisans were planning to attack Sarajevo, just as the Partisans were aware through their own agents of Sarajevo's defence plans and of German plans for an offensive.<sup>167</sup> In Kozara in

## THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

September 1942, Chetniks allegedly disguised themselves as Partisans to plunder both Muslim and Serb villages.<sup>168</sup> In January 1943, the Partisans reported the existence of a 'Proletarian Brigade' formed by the Chetniks in Hercegovina to plunder the local population.<sup>169</sup> In February 1944, the Chetnik Dinara Division ordered all its Chetnik commanders to infiltrate agents into Partisan ranks to carry out acts of espionage and assassination.<sup>170</sup>

There were inevitably those agents whose precise loyalties were not clear, even to themselves. One such was Ratimir Paternoster, Commissioner of the UNS in Banja Luka and himself a former left-wing activist from the inter-war period. Under the influence of Ismeta Demirović, an NOP agent whom he tried to seduce, Paternoster attempted to free NOP prisoners from the UNS prison in the town and burn its archives. Bungling both tasks, he then followed Demirović in fleeing to Partisan territory, perhaps out of love for her. But his earlier misdeeds were not forgiven him and he was sentenced to death by a Partisan court and executed.<sup>171</sup> Another such figure was Nada Vranković, KPJ Secretary for the Sarajevo ward of Kovačići, whose father casually mentioned to a fellow NOP supporter in the autumn of 1942 that he had twice seen her chatting to an Ustasha policeman. Vranković was summoned to a Sarajevo flat where two Party members locked her in, drew a pistol on her and accused her of being an Ustasha agent. She confessed to having been recruited by the Ustasha police during the arrests of the previous April. The Communists thereupon tried to re-recruit her and use her to capture her police superior, but Vranković vacillated and refused to cooperate. A Party court was established that sentenced her to death and she was killed by a Communist wearing a German uniform.<sup>172</sup>

Perhaps most tragic is the case of Zaga Blažić-Bela, an NOP agent sent from Sarajevo to Banja Luka in the summer of 1942 to restore the town's NOP network following its devastation by arrests. It is uncertain when Blažić, the lover of the slain Communist leader Mahmut Bušatlija-Buš, began to collaborate with the Ustasas; one of her fellow agents with whom she stayed prior to her departure for Banja Luka claims that she was already acting suspiciously—'she smoked all night and her eyes were swollen from sleeplessness'.<sup>173</sup> In Banja Luka, she made an unwilling Communist operative and seems to have cracked under the pressure of her job. At the start of October, she sought relocation, citing her lack of knowledge of the city and its people, the ineffectiveness of the KPJ organisation there and the impossible conditions created by the Ustasha terror.<sup>174</sup> Within a couple of months Blažić was arrested in Banja Luka and tortured. She attempted suicide in prison before agreeing to collaborate—or resume collaboration—with the Ustasas. Once out of prison, Blažić revealed her collaboration to the KPJ Local Committee, which consequently organised an exodus of activists from the town to escape further arrests. Blažić was initially expelled from the Party and sent to fight as a private in a Partisan company. When additional information reached the Partisans about her prior treasonous activities in Sarajevo, she was sentenced to death and executed.<sup>175</sup>

### *The NOP and the Home Guard*

The Ustasas had formally succeeded in creating overnight a state with armed forces numbering nearly 100,000, which subsequently peaked at approximately



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250,000. In practice, the overwhelming majority of these were conscripts, most of whom were scarcely committed to the Ustasha cause. The motivation, morale, fighting quality, equipment, training and discipline of the Home Guard were among the lowest in the history of modern warfare, on a par with the Russian Army in World War I or the Italian Army in World War II. The German lack of confidence in the Croatian troops meant that the Home Guard was not allowed to develop fully after the April War as a serious military force; the Germans and Italians confiscated virtually all the armaments of the defeated Yugoslav Army rather than allowing the Home Guard to inherit them.<sup>176</sup>

At the same time, indiscriminate Ustasha conscription led to many NOP sympathisers being mobilised in the Home Guard. The Home Guards were badly treated by their Ustasha masters. Poorly equipped and trained, many were forced to serve beyond the expiry of their legal term. Peasant recruits in the Home Guard were prevented from returning home to work their fields. The regime was unable or unwilling to guarantee to the Home Guard pay and rations equal to those of the Ustasha troops, something that was a major source of resentment.<sup>177</sup> Home Guards captured by the Partisans at Bosanski Novi and Dvor in late November 1942 told their captors they had virtually no food and nothing in the way of shelter, so that they were both starving and freezing.<sup>178</sup> Yet Home Guard resentment of the Ustashes was not tempered by respect; according to one Italian intelligence source, as many as 70 per cent of Home Guard officers 'criticised the incompetence of the Ustasha forces as well as their organisation'.<sup>179</sup>

The resentment of the Home Guards was also directed against the Wehrmacht, whose officers tended to treat them as something between slaves and cannon fodder, even on occasion threatening to shoot them in the back to force them to carry out orders.<sup>180</sup> The huge NDH armed forces furthermore represented a considerable drain on the manpower resources of the Ustasha 'state'. Since these forces were always under complete or virtual control by the occupying powers, primarily the Germans, and used to wage war almost entirely against domestic resistance groups, they amounted in practice to a further economic imposition on the country by the Axis, one that was much greater than in occupied Serbia where the quisling forces never numbered more than about 35,000. The huge size of the NDH's forces, far from ensuring the security of the regime, merely added an additional motor generating resistance among the Croat and Muslim population.

In addition to the institutional division and rivalry between the two branches of the NDH armed forces, there was a difference of ideology and orientation, for the Home Guard was a regular army seeking order and security, without the national-extremist ideology of the Ustashes, while the Ustasha military force was a fascist body whose *raison d'être* was the persecution of non-Croats. The Ustashes' deliberate baiting and persecution of Serbs and Jews, by inciting resistance threatened the tenuous military authority of the Home Guard. The Home Guard garrison commander at Petrovo Selo near Tuzla complained in October 1941 of Ustashes arriving from outside to persecute Serbs and Jews, disturbing the peace and bypassing his authority. He requested from his superiors that 'in future the responsible organs ban all activities in the rear and on the stations that occur without the knowledge of the station commander, and in particular actions by unknown people as well as activities that insult the feelings of other nationalities, because it is creating greater discontent'.<sup>181</sup> The Home Guard Lieutenant Colonel



Nojnberger, a garrison commander in the vicinity of Bosanski Novi, was disgusted by the Ustasha treatment of local Serb villagers and responded by supplying the Partisans with munitions. He was hanged by the Ustasas.<sup>182</sup>

In this context, the Communists did not view the regular army of the NDH as an enemy, rather as an unredeemed part of the nation that had to be won over if the revolution were to succeed. In this it was different from the Ustasha militia, which the Communists viewed as a mortal enemy. The KPJ aimed not to defeat the Home Guard militarily, but rather to dissolve and subvert it from within, through a propaganda campaign that emphasised Croatian patriotism and downplayed Yugoslavia. The KPJ Central Committee itself issued an appeal in September to the Home Guard, along Croatian patriotic lines, directed against the Ustasas as 'traitors to our homeland'. The appeal stated the Central Committee's belief that the 'freedom-loving Croatian nation, that has for centuries struggled against its oppressors, cannot passively endure the degradation, violence, tyranny and plunder of its current oppressors, the fascist occupiers and their faithful dogs—the Frankist hirelings', and would consequently 'expel the fascist occupiers and destroy the hateful puppet government of the traitor Pavelić, so that Dalmatia, Primorje and Međimurje, which the Frankist traitors have sold to the occupiers, be returned to Croatia, which would achieve its true national freedom and independence'. The Central Committee promised that 'from the ruins of the tyranny of the occupiers and the Frankists will rise a free and independent Croatia in which there will be no trace of the Frankists' and occupiers' tyranny, plunder, evil chauvinism and racial insanity'. The appeal did not mention the word 'Yugoslavia' except in a slogan at the end of its message calling for the 'fraternal solidarity of all the nations of Yugoslavia'.<sup>183</sup>

In August or September 1941 an appeal by the Partisan General Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the 'Soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers of the Croatian Army', distributed in Sarajevo, did not use the word 'Yugoslavia' even once, in any context. According to the appeal, for the 'national liberation of our country the Croatian nation has arisen, the Muslim and Serb population has arisen, all true and honest patriots are joining the People's Liberation Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The appeal called for 'All in the struggle for the liberation of our homeland'—though it perhaps deliberately did not specify whether the 'homeland' in question was Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina—and denounced Pavelić for having surrendered to the Italians 'our magnificent Dalmatia, our proud Lika and Herzegovina'.<sup>184</sup> The Central Committee of the KPH's appeal in August to the 'Soldiers, NCOs and officers' of the Croatian Army called for a 'Free, independent and progressive Croatia' and claimed that 'the armed liberation struggle of the Croatian nation has begun', though this time it was proclaimed to be 'a component part of that titanic struggle of all the enslaved nations of Yugoslavia, all the enslaved and freedom-loving nations of the world, headed by the invincible USSR'.<sup>185</sup> The Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina appealed to the Home Guard in September:

Will you really allow the proud Croatian Army to be placed in the service of common criminals and traitors to the Croatian nation? Will you really allow the proud Croatian Army to be placed in the service of foreign conquerors? You have seen that the People's Liberation Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina is not waging war against you. You have seen that

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it does not kill or imprison Croatian officers and soldiers, for the Liberation Army of Bosnia–Hercegovina does not kill the sons of its nation who are in the Croatian Army.<sup>186</sup>

The Partisan Staff for Bosanska Krajina appealed in October to the 'Soldiers and Officers of the Croatian Army', describing in detail how the Partisans regularly released captured Home Guards unharmed.<sup>187</sup>

The making of Croatian patriotic propaganda directed at the Home Guard was not restricted to the Partisan leadership but was the work of regional and local Partisan and Communist bodies across Bosnia–Hercegovina. In August, the Hercegovinian Communist leadership issued an appeal to the 'Soldiers of the Croatian Army' that cited the struggle of Croatian Partisans for the 'freedom of the Croatian nation' and ended with the slogan 'Long live the Croatian Nation!', but wholly omitted any mention of Yugoslavia.<sup>188</sup>

The Staff of the Drvar Brigade instructed the Battalion Staff of the Partisan Detachments for Glamoč in September 1941 that whereas 'We have nothing to discuss with the Italian occupiers or with Pavelić's Ustasha bands', and that consequently negotiations with them were forbidden, 'So far as the Croatian Army is concerned, we can talk with them insofar as the Croatian Army is not acting as an organ of Pavelić's Ustasha government and his treacherous policy toward the Croatian nation'.<sup>189</sup> In November, the Partisans dug up part of the road between Banja Luka and Jajce and blew up a bridge, leaving behind a pamphlet for the Home Guards informing them:

your brother Croats are leaving you some telephone numbers. The one on the left is for Ante in Zagreb and the one on the right is for Berlin. Greetings from your brother Communists. Those who do not wish to listen any more should surrender and put down their arms; we'll accept them into our people's military force like our brothers.<sup>190</sup>

In early 1942 the Operational Staff for Hercegovina appealed to the Home Guard garrison of Bileća with the slogan 'Long live the unity of the Bileća Partisans and the Croatian Army!'<sup>191</sup> The Tuzla NOPO Staff, in negotiations with the Ustasha commander of Vlasenica in East Bosnia, argued that the NDH 'is neither independent, nor a state, nor Croatia when Hitler and Mussolini rule in it'.<sup>192</sup>

Propaganda was not the only means by which the NOP attempted to co-opt Home Guards. Once again, individual Communists and Home Guards were bound together by ties of friendship, family and locality, enabling the former to approach the latter. Todor Vujasinović, commander of the Ozren Detachment, recalls inspecting a group of Home Guard prisoners in December 1941 and discovering that one of them was the painter and Communist sympathiser Ismet Mujezinović, famous after the war for his epic depictions of Partisans and their struggle but at the time serving as a Home Guard officer. Vujasinović recalls: 'Ismet recognised me immediately and greeted me earnestly. We had known each other ever since secondary school in Tuzla, where we lived in the same part of the town.' Mujezinović had helped secure the surrender of his unit to the Partisans without a struggle, and went on to introduce Vujasinović to other NOP sympathisers from among his fellow Home Guards.<sup>193</sup>

The campaign to win over members of the Home Guard was taken very seriously by the Bosnian Partisans. The Bosnian General Staff's official report of 8 September 1941 claimed that:

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the Croatian Army on the whole will not fight against the People's Liberation Bosnian-Herzegovinian Army. It showed this in the great battles around Jajce, Kladanj, Olovo and Vlasenica, where it went over to the side of the Partisans, surrendered its weapons and equipment and returned to its homes. It showed this in Herzegovina, where it not only surrendered its weapons and equipment, but at Stolac went over wholly to the side of the Partisans and fought in our ranks against the occupiers.<sup>194</sup>

Lepa Perović reported in September from Herzegovina that 'the Croatian Army is collapsing and it is far from being a bastion of the occupiers; it is dangerous ballast for them; its masses are objectively forces of the revolution'.<sup>195</sup> Vukmanović-Tempo repeated this in his report of 20 September: the Croatian Army was 'dangerous ballast' for the occupiers and 'its masses are mostly on the side of the People's Army'.<sup>196</sup>

The Communist policy of agitation among the Home Guard made correct treatment of Home Guard prisoners an imperative, and the latter were therefore usually released from Partisan captivity unharmed, unless they had participated in war crimes. In Herzegovina, whereas Ustashes captured by the Partisans were executed, captured Home Guards were 'sent off after a feast and the giving of speeches and greetings to the Croatian nation and our common struggle. Frequently, their captured soldiers and officers exchange reminiscences with the veterans of the People's Army'.<sup>197</sup> In August 1942 the Partisans captured more than half the garrison of Mrkonjić Grad when they liberated the town:

The captured Home Guards were spoken to of the goals of our struggle, after which all those who wanted to go home were released. The captives were first transferred to the territory of Janj, then, escorted by our units, across the Vrbas. In this way, we intended to help those captive Home Guards to avoid travelling across the Jajce garrison, in order that they should be able to arrive home with less risk.<sup>198</sup>

The treatment of captured Home Guards was an issue that divided the Partisans from the Chetniks, for while the Partisans sought to release captured Home Guards as part of their political programme of subverting the NDH from within, the Chetniks might either release them, in order to facilitate a *modus vivendi* with the Ustashes, or execute them as representatives of the Croatian enemy. In December, Cvijetin Todić, as deputy commander of the Ozren Detachment and a future Chetnik, ordered Đoko Sešlak, as Commander of the Bosansko Petrovo Selo Company and a KPJ member, to execute a group of captured Home Guards, which Sešlak refused to do.<sup>199</sup> This was an issue that on occasion divided the Communists even from their own Partisan rank and file, as the latter, drawn from the uneducated peasantry, were inclined to treat Home Guards simply as the enemy. When in September 1941 Partisans in the Korenica region of Croatia massacred about forty Croat quisling soldiers of the German 373<sup>rd</sup> Division, the Local Committee of the KPJ for Bihać sent a formal complaint to the District Committee for Korenica, claiming that this 'crime' had made Communist agitation among the 373<sup>rd</sup> Division much more difficult. The Local Committee therefore demanded the trial of those Partisans responsible and the publication of the sentences.<sup>200</sup> A similar crisis occurred in February 1942 when a group of Partisans of the Iskra Battalion—apparently under Chetnik influence—entered a school at

Pljeva in Central Bosnia where forty-two Home Guard prisoners were being held and massacred all but one, who succeeded in escaping. The crime was widely condemned by the Partisans of the region, particularly by those of the Pelagić Battalion who had captured the prisoners in the first place. Some felt so strongly as to suggest that the Pelagić Battalion should in future refrain from handing over prisoners to their Detachment's staff, where they would be at the mercy of less reliable battalions such as the Iskra Battalion, but should hold on to them itself.<sup>201</sup>

The Communists genuinely strove to avoid such bad publicity and, following its execution of a group of Home Guards for the plunder and killing of civilians, the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment on 10 April 1942 issued an explanation and justification of their actions to the local Home Guards, assuring them that they had behaved fraternally towards the Home Guard in general, that they were not Chetniks and were not waging a war against the Croatian nation.<sup>202</sup> The Communists made genuine efforts to hold fair trials of captured Home Guards suspected of war crimes. On 27 September 1941 the Romanija Partisans tried 168 captured Muslim and Croat Home Guards and four of their officers for a number of offences, among which was 'betraying the interests of the Croatian nation'. Three of the officers were sentenced to death while the fourth was acquitted. Eight Home Guards and five Ustashas found among the Home Guards were sentenced to death while the remainder were released; of these, fourteen had surrendered voluntarily to the Partisans and were therefore given by the court an official display of gratitude before the assembled local population, which 'emphasised that the joint struggle of the Croat and Serb nations is the road upon which both brother nations will soon reach freedom and destroy their common enemy'.<sup>203</sup> On 26 December, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment captured a patrol of eight Home Guard soldiers; seven were released while the sergeant was retained for a prisoner exchange. By contrast, when four days later the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment captured eleven Ustashas, eight were executed while three were released in the absence of sufficient evidence that they were Ustashas.<sup>204</sup>

The capture of Home Guards was an occasion for their indoctrination with NOP propaganda. On 1 January 1942, the Kozara Partisans claimed to have captured 460 members of the NDH armed forces in recent fighting and, except for four that were kept for a prisoner exchange, 'all the remainder were allowed to go home after they were informed of the goals of our People's Liberation Struggle'.<sup>205</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Detachment captured eleven gendarmes on 21 December 1941 and nineteen Home Guards on 17 January 1942; on both occasions all were released after being informed of the goals of the NOP.<sup>206</sup> In March 1942 thirty-eight Home Guards surrendered to the Petrovac Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Detachment; all were released and the Partisans refrained, on account of a promise prior to the surrender, from confiscating their uniforms.<sup>207</sup> According to a directive of the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Detachment to the NOOs on its territory on 31 January 1942:

Towards all wounded [enemy] soldiers one must behave as well as possible, one must not take from them anything except their weapons... Through our good treatment of the captured and wounded we shall achieve much both militarily and politically, for the future life of the free peoples of Yugoslavia and for the brotherly relations between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>208</sup>

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The persistent Communist efforts at appealing to the Home Guards, agitating among them and treating them correctly gradually began to bear fruit as many of them lost the will to fight the Partisans and in some places even began to sympathise with them. In mid February 1942, the 130-strong Home Guard garrison at Han Kola in north-west Bosnia surrendered to the Partisans without firing a shot after the latter called upon it to surrender. The Operational Staff for Bosanska Krajina reported in early March that captured Home Guard soldiers and officers were choosing to join the Partisans in preference to returning to the NDH-held towns.<sup>209</sup> The Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Detachment reported in mid March that 'in the ranks of the Croatian Home Guards there is great sympathy for the Partisans and fear of the Chetniks. The Home Guards announce that they will fight against the Chetniks.'<sup>210</sup> At Bosanski Petrovac on 20 March 1942 a company of fifty Home Guards under two officers surrendered by agreement to the Partisans, turning over to the Partisans a large quantity of weapons and ammunition in the process. The commanding officer was hostile to the Ustashas and had been impressed by the Partisan statement of policy.<sup>211</sup> In March at Smoljana, a large festival organised under the auspices of the 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina Detachment, reported to have attracted about a thousand young people, was attended 'by a Partisan company and by the Croatian Army which arrived from Petrovac'.<sup>212</sup> At Brčko in April 1942, five Home Guards were arrested as suspected rebel sympathisers, but were subsequently deemed not guilty and released.<sup>213</sup> In early 1943 the Home Guard garrison in Teslić in north-central Bosnia, 1,200-strong and including its commander and officer corps, surrendered to the Partisans without a struggle thanks in large part to the agitation of NOP agents within the garrison.<sup>214</sup>

Home Guards sympathetic to the NOP were from the start of the uprising a source of munitions and other supplies for the Partisans. Alija Mehić, a sergeant at the Home Guard magazine in Banja Luka, supplied the Partisans with munitions and medical supplies. Mehić's father was the chauffeur of Džafer Kulenović, Deputy Prime Minister of the NDH, but even he was a source of medical supplies for the Partisans, which he brought all the way from Zagreb; naturally the police never searched his car.<sup>215</sup> In Trebinje in southern Hercegovina the Communists established links in the autumn of 1941 with sympathetic Home Guards, who consequently provided the Partisans with weapons, munitions, sanitation materials and other goods.<sup>216</sup> In Kotor Varoš, a town to the east of Banja Luka, the quisling forces were particularly ready to collaborate with the NOP. The Home Guard commander in Kotor Varoš until November 1941 was Josip Pinculić, an NOP sympathiser, who protected local Serbs.<sup>217</sup> The NOP had an agent in the Home Guard magazines in Kotor Varoš from which he supplied the Partisans. The Partisans in Kotor Varoš also acquired weapons and munitions from the Home Guards in exchange for tobacco, which two NOP agents working as revenue officers would confiscate from smugglers. These revenue officers would then transport the military equipment to the Partisan-held villages in the carts of peasants who came into town to drink. The gendarme commander in Kotor Varoš was himself an NOP supporter and turned a blind eye to this activity.<sup>218</sup> In Tešanj in Central Bosnia, the Home Guards supplied munitions to the NOP.<sup>219</sup> In Ozren on 14 April 1942 the Home Guard Second Lieutenant Stanko Oreļ met with Partisans

of the Lipac Company to offer them the supply of weapons and munitions from the armoured train that he was guarding. Orelj, a Croat schoolteacher from Slavonia and KPJ sympathiser, offered to surrender the entire train to them.<sup>220</sup> When Kosta Nađ prepared to depart Sarajevo in February to take up the position of Partisan commander for Bosanska Krajina, he spent the night before his departure in the apartment of a Home Guard sergeant and NOP sympathiser, Ivica Kršulj. Nađ's false identification papers had been manufactured for him by NOP sympathisers at the Sarajevo railway workshop.<sup>221</sup>

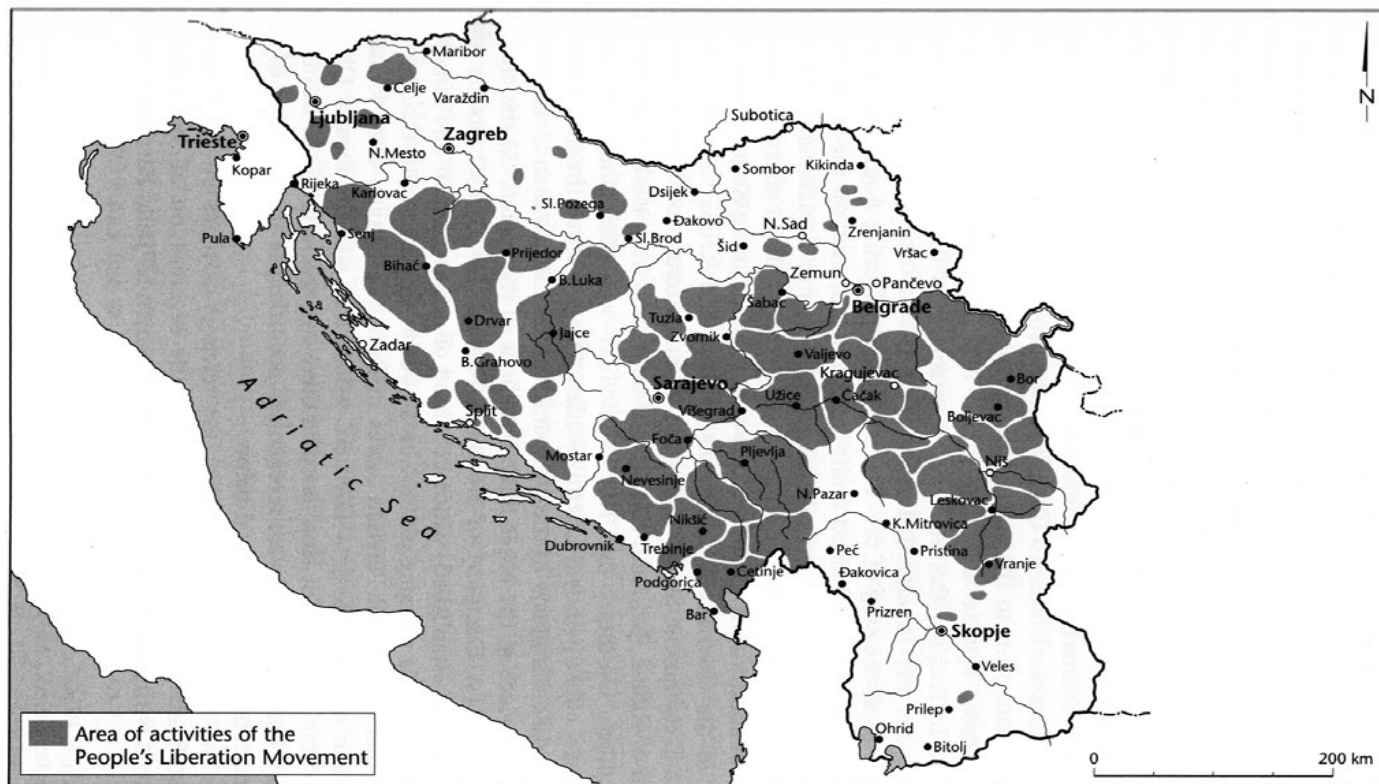
In Jajce, sympathetic Home Guards supplied military information and munitions to the Communists.<sup>222</sup> One such Home Guard was Šaban Kovač, who in July 1942 arranged the capture by the Pelagić Partisan Battalion of the Home Guard garrison of Bravnici by sabotaging its defences and then leading the Partisans into the base. The will of the Bravnici Home Guard to fight was sapped by the distribution of Partisan propaganda to the garrison and village, which fell without the loss of a life on either side. Kovač then joined the Partisans and subsequently participated in the liberation of Belgrade in 1944.<sup>223</sup> The information provided by Home Guard sympathisers greatly assisted the Partisans in their capture of Jajce in September 1942; they received precise data on the numbers and distribution of enemy forces, their armaments and installations.<sup>224</sup> Following the liberation of Jajce in September 1942, the Partisans provided medical treatment to wounded Home Guards, who had expected to be executed. The Partisans then left their wounded prisoners behind when they withdrew from the town for a calculated propaganda effect among the returning civilians and Home Guards.<sup>225</sup> One Communist report of the period noted: 'A particularly large impact was created by the release of Home Guards who were arrested in Mrkonjić Grad. These Home Guards created a genuine stir in Jajce and the surrounding area by talking about how the Partisans do not kill Home Guards and civilians but hunt only Ustasas.'<sup>226</sup> An additional propaganda victory was scored by the Partisans when they liberated Jajce for the second time in November 1942, employing the 1<sup>st</sup> Dalmatian Brigade. This was the first encounter by the civilians and Partisans of the region with a large Partisan unit made up mostly of Croats, and was used to good propaganda effect by the KPJ in demonstrating the willingness of Croats to join the NOP and fight the Pavelić regime.<sup>227</sup>

Although among the Axis and quisling forces it was naturally natives of Yugoslavia who were most ready to defect to the Partisans, it is nevertheless indicative of the atmosphere of the times that there was at least one case of a German soldier who 'went native'. Karl Scheunach, a twenty-five-year-old Austrian socialist, was a regular visitor during the summer of 1941 to a barber's shop in Marindvor in Sarajevo, where three NOP supporters worked. He guessed the political character of the employees and asked to be recruited into the anti-fascist struggle. He was taken to a Partisan family in Novo Sarajevo where his host, as it happened, was himself a former Austro-Hungarian soldier and able to converse a little with him. The Austrian was taken to rebel territory on Igman where he was soon warmly accepted by the other Partisans. He eventually adopted the Serb name 'Dušan' in place of Karl, though he had difficulty learning the language, and wholly assumed the Partisan life and identity. He showed great bravery and was seriously wounded in action. Eventually, Tito's Supreme Staff, then based in nearby Foča, learnt of

Dušan's existence and from April 1942 he was attached to it. He fought at the Battle of the Neretva where he was mortally wounded and was buried at the village of Jažići near Kalinovik, in a grave shared with other Partisan dead.<sup>228</sup> Scheunach's story was, in a way, exemplary of that of the underground NOP in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Bolsheviks took power in Petrograd in November 1917 by infiltrating and co-opting the Russian Army, so that at that stage there was a virtually bloodless revolution. Likewise, the Partisans were to take control in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina by infiltrating and co-opting large sections of the Home Guard. The trickle of Home Guard defections to the Partisans in 1942 was to become a flood in the years that followed.



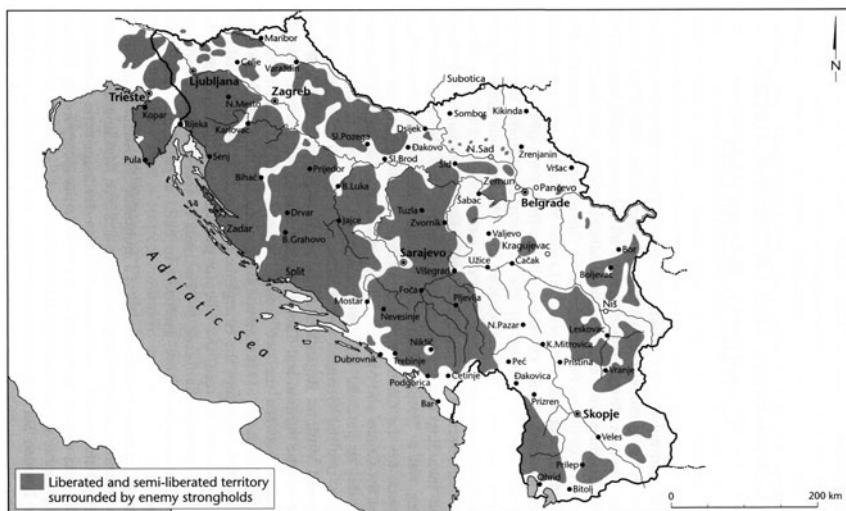


Map 3: Area of military operations of the People's Liberation Movement in 1941.





Map 4: Liberated territory of Yugoslavia at the end of 1942.



Map 5: Liberated territory of Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1943.

## THE MUSLIM AND CROAT REBELLION

c. APRIL 1943–OCTOBER 1943

*The political influence of the notables rests on two factors: on the one hand, they must possess 'access' to authority, and so be able to advise, to warn, and in general to speak for society or some part of it at the ruler's court; on the other, they must have some social power of their own, whatever its form and origin, which is not dependent on the ruler and gives them a position of accepted and 'natural' leadership. Around the central core of this independent power they can, if they are skillful, create a coalition of forces both urban and rural.*

Albert Hourani, *Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables*<sup>1</sup>

The year 1943 witnessed the turning of the tide for the NOP in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Italian collaboration with the Chetniks and the triumphalist Chetnik genocidal assault on the Bosnian Muslim and Croat population increasingly discredited the NDH and the Ustasas as the latter's protectors, revealing them to be powerless. The flagship project of the Muslim autonomist resistance—the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division 'Handschar'—far from establishing a military force to protect the Muslims, threatened to remove their combat-age males from Bosnian soil and leave their homes undefended from the Chetniks. Finally, with the Italian collapse in the summer and autumn of 1943, the Germans increasingly abandoned their hostility to the Chetniks and closed ranks with the latter on an anti-Partisan basis, heightening Muslim fears of a possible German-Serbian understanding at their expense—rumours circulated that Hitler was preparing to hand over part or all of Bosnia to Nedić's Serbia. These factors catalysed the growing Muslim, and to a lesser extent Croat, support for the NOP in Bosnia, both among the general population and the elite.

In this period, the NOP increased its activity among the Muslim and Croat population and its agitation on the platform of Bosnian and Croatian liberation and self-determination. It pursued a sympathetic policy towards the Home Guard

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and the Muslim Domdo legion, treating them as parts of the nation to be redeemed rather than as enemies, and agitating to co-opt their officers, leaders and soldiers. The stream of defections to the Partisans from these quisling formations, turning into a flood, resulted in battlefield successes and gave the Partisans a multinational composition that began to resemble the national composition of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a whole. The coordinated defection of several Muslim notables to the NOP in the autumn of 1943 meant that the latter had successfully co-opted part of the Muslim autonomist opposition to the Ustasha regime.

The Partisan capture of the north-east Bosnian city of Tuzla in October 1943, achieved through the collaboration and defection of its Home Guard defenders, marked the Bosnian Partisans' definite evolution from an essentially Serb rebel army with a multinational leadership into an army that was multinational at all levels. This formed part of a broader Partisan expansion among the non-Serb peoples of Yugoslavia that took place across the whole western half of the county, and would ultimately ensure the Partisan victory. In the short-term, the NOP's successes in the autumn of 1943 paved the way for an eventual Partisan push eastward into Serbia and for the establishment of a Partisan legislative body for the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina that would in turn provide the foundation for a new Bosnian state.

### *The Chetnik 'March on Bosnia' and Muslim alienation from the Axis*

The Chetnik supreme commander Draža Mihailović, with his movement apparently at the height of its success against the Partisans, informed his Chetnik corps on 2 January 1943 of his plan to destroy the Partisan forces in the Bihać Republic in order to 'liberate this Serb territory from Communist terror'.<sup>2</sup> Mihailović's 'March on Bosnia' involved, in addition to a campaign against the Partisans, a genocidal assault on the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sanjak. Although Mihailović ordered his subordinates in this period to win the support of Muslims and Croats, this represented merely a tactical manoeuvre that did not change the fundamentally anti-Muslim character of the Chetnik movement. Thus, in March, Mihailović listed as one of his successes: 'In the Sanjak we have liquidated all Muslims in the villages except those in the small towns.'<sup>3</sup> Pavle Đurišić, commander of the Lim-Sanjak Chetnik Detachment, reported to Mihailović on 13 February the results of the Chetnik actions in the Pljevlja, Foča and Čajniče districts: 'All Muslim villages in the three mentioned districts were totally burned so that not a single home remained in one piece. All property was destroyed except cattle, corn and senna.' Furthermore: 'During the operation the total destruction of the Muslim inhabitants was carried out regardless of sex and age.' In this operation 'our total losses were 22 dead, of which 2 through accidents, and 32 wounded. Among the Muslims, around 1,200 fighters and up to 8,000 other victims: women, old people and children.' The remaining Muslim population fled, and Đurišić reported that action had been taken to prevent their return.<sup>4</sup> These losses inflicted on the Muslims were in addition to the approximately one thousand women and children massacred by Đurišić's forces in the same area in early January.<sup>5</sup> In March, according to a UNS report, the Chetniks massacred about five hundred Muslims in the Goražde district, 'mostly children, women and

old people', and raped many women. In the village of Močevići, they built a lavatory out of Muslim corpses and wrote on the entrance 'Muslim mosque'.<sup>6</sup>

Like Ustasha policy towards the Serbs, Chetnik policy towards the Muslims vacillated between violent aggression and attempts to gain their collaboration, so that the massive atrocities of Đurišić and others went hand in hand with the use of Ismet Popovac's Muslim Chetniks to pacify the Muslim population. In some areas, Chetnik commanders appealed to the Muslims on the basis of the Serbs' and Muslims' shared history of coexistence, much as the Partisans did.<sup>7</sup> Yet such assurances could only ring hollow given their irregularity and evident insincerity. In this period the Chetniks of the Bosanska Gradiška region announced that 'Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Poles and Czechs may join us' but that 'there is no place for Muslims among us'.<sup>8</sup> The issue of the Bosnian Chetnik newspaper *Vidovdan* that appeared on 1 March appealed to 'honourable Muslims' to join the Chetnik struggle, but informed them that 'you were Serbs, you have shown this and you will remain so', and described Bosnia as a 'Serb land'.<sup>9</sup> A second issue of *Vidovdan* appearing a few days later warned that 'the Muslims must forever abandon the idea of an autonomist arrangement of the future state. Yugoslavia will be arranged on the basis of the South Slav tribes. The Muslims do not comprise a distinct tribe. An autonomist arrangement for the state is alien to the Serbian tradition and state idea'.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Chetnik appeals to the Muslims, unlike the Partisan appeals, did not involve any respect for Muslim or Bosnian individuality or autonomy. Combined with the frequent news of Chetnik atrocities, this ensured that the Chetniks would have very limited success in winning Muslim support.

In the course of the Chetnik operations of this period, a document was circulated among the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, several versions of which fell into the hands of the UNS.<sup>11</sup> The document, dated 20 December 1941, carried Draža Mihailović's signature and claimed that the Chetnik goal was 'the establishment of a Great Yugoslavia and within it a Great Serbia, ethnically clean within the borders of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Srem, Banat and Bačka', and 'the establishment of a direct border between Serbia and Montenegro as well as Serbia and Slovenia, through cleansing the Sanjak of its Muslim inhabitants and Bosnia of its Muslim and Croat inhabitants'.<sup>12</sup> Although this order may not really have originated with Mihailović and although his signature on it may have been a forgery, it is unclear whether it was a forgery originating with local Chetnik commanders seeking justification for a radical anti-Muslim policy, or with the Ustasha authorities themselves seeking to discredit the Chetniks in Muslim eyes. Either way, the circulation of such a document can only have increased Muslim disquiet.

Italian support for the Chetniks meant that the NDH military was often wholly unable to offer the Muslim and Croat population any protection. According to the report of the Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment of 13 February 1943:

The Italian military forces are arranged across the territory of our regiment—our population does not receive from them any kind of protection, on the contrary: in the course of the anti-Communist operations on the terrain they kill, imprison, plunder and destroy in the most cases those citizens who are honourable Croats and not Communist-Partisan sympathisers... The Chetnik forces are well organised and numerous and when in Eastern

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Hercegovina our authority is very weakly felt; the majority of our Catholic and Muslim inhabitants have fled, insofar as they were not exterminated.<sup>13</sup>

The evident impotence of the NDH's political and military forces in the face of these atrocities discredited them in the eyes of the Hercegovinian Muslims and Croats. The Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment reported at the end of March: 'The suffering is great and among the mass of the people has provoked a great revolt and hostility towards the state authorities that are not in a position to hinder and prevent these misdeeds.'<sup>14</sup> So contemptuous were the Italians and Chetniks towards the local non-Serb population that, according to one UNS report, they were readier to bombard Croat- and Muslim-inhabited areas than Serb areas held by the Partisans.<sup>15</sup>

Mostar acted as a hub of Chetnik activity through which Chetnik forces regularly passed at the will of their commanders and the Italians, plundering the inhabitants en route.<sup>16</sup> The Chetnik administration for eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina was also based in Mostar, with Petar Bačović as military commander and Dobroslav Jevđević as chief political representative of the movement.<sup>17</sup> The city had its own Chetnik police force, whose repression was directed against the civilian population, particularly the Muslims and Croats. An agent of the UNS reported on 1 March:

In all the municipalities and villages surrounding Mostar, the Chetniks rule and the Croatian [i.e. Croat and Muslim] population is threatened with danger and massacre more from them than from the Partisans, for where they go they kill and burn everything. At Buna near Mostar, almost all municipalities have been burned. At the municipality of Bielo-Polje near Mostar, the Chetniks have disarmed the gendarmes, who were the only representatives of our authority, and sent them to Mostar. They are doing there whatever they want and are absolute masters.<sup>18</sup>

The Ustasha authorities in Mostar were forced to provide grain to the Chetniks, even though the citizens of Mostar were bordering on starvation.<sup>19</sup> Jevđević felt sufficiently confident in this period to reply coldly to a German offer of an alliance against the Partisans, claiming that the Italians were fulfilling the Chetniks' demands, and that so long as NDH troops remained in Bosnia, Chetnik policy would remain anti-Ustasha. Jevđević, nevertheless, had a suggestion for his German interlocutor: 'I advised him, that that province [Bosnia] be surrendered to General Nedić or to the Italians, for otherwise it would never know peace.'<sup>20</sup>

This Chetnik domination of the Mostar region was not immediately affected by the Chetniks' rout in the Battle of the Neretva in March 1943. At the end of April, an agent of the UNS reported:

The impudence of the Chetniks around Mostar, Gacko, Nevesinje, Stolac and Bileća exceeds all bounds. They have already become so impudent that they rape wives and sisters in front of their husbands and brothers. The Chetniks hold all power in these parts, and that small part of our army that exists is impotent. In a short time, if this continues, there will be no Croats left in these parts at all.<sup>21</sup>

The Chetnik police in Mostar arrested thirty young Muslims at the end of April on the grounds that they were Communists, several of whom were then murdered. When the Muslim mayor of Mostar intervened with the Italian com-

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mander of the town on behalf of those arrested, he was coldly received and shouted at by the commander.<sup>22</sup>

There was a corresponding sense of triumph among the Chetniks in the early months of 1943. Pavle Đurišić announced to the Muslims of the Sanjak that 'our brave and invincible Chetnik detachments ALREADY RULE the whole of Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Hercegovina, Lika, Kordun, Northern Dalmatia, Slavonia and Slovenia'; he advised them that 'it is the last chance for you to think about your fate' and to go over to the Chetniks immediately, 'because afterwards it will be too late' (emphasis in original).<sup>23</sup> The Chetnik leaders frequently treated the Home Guard and Ustasha leaders with contempt, feeling that they had the upper hand. They carried Yugoslav flags through the cities of the NDH; they disarmed and robbed Home Guards and gendarmes; they taunted their NDH opposite numbers for their alleged cowardice and treason, with Jevđević publicly claiming that of 'the mass of captured Communists' in Chetnik hands '90 per cent are Croatian former Home Guards'.<sup>24</sup> The commander of the Vučjak Chetnik Detachment boasted to the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Home Guard Regiment in a letter of February 1943 that 'after less than two years of the existence of the NDH in its original borders, we now hold 70 per cent of that territory', and that the Chetniks were 'the relative masters of the NDH'.<sup>25</sup> The Chetniks in the Foča region engaged in this period in the systematic forced conversion of Muslims to the Orthodox religion; they also spread the news that the Italians had agreed that Bosnia-Hercegovina would form part of a Great Serbia.<sup>26</sup>

News of the Italian-Chetnik wrongdoing spread from Hercegovina across Bosnia-Hercegovina, catalysing the fear and insecurity felt by the Muslims and their dislike of the Ustasha regime. In Tuzla in the north-east, the Great Župan reported in March that local sentiment had been 'negatively affected by the dispatch from Sarajevo of a large number of refugees to the territory of the *župa*, to regions already overflowing with refugees, as well as to those that are unable either to house or to feed them' and that:

the feelings of the population have also been negatively affected by the sad news of the destruction of the Muslim inhabitants of Sanjak, Goražde and Čajniče; as well as the conditions arising from the taking over of government by the Chetniks—Montenegrins—in the districts of Nevesinje, Bileća, Gacko, Stolac and Trebinje; their approach to Mostar itself; and the attacks of the Partisans on Konjic and on the areas between Mostar and Konjic.<sup>27</sup>

In the town of Bosanski Petrovac in the south-west, the UNS reported at the start of April that 'among the higher circles of the Muslims there is some degree of revolt and they are apparently not satisfied; they would like to achieve some degree of prestige in our state in the political sense and eventually to achieve an independent and autonomous Bosnia...'<sup>28</sup> When the Wehrmacht took control of Mostar from the Italians and Chetniks in early June the change was greeted with rejoicing by the Mostar citizenry.<sup>29</sup> Yet in May 1943 the fraternisation of Germans and Chetniks in the town of Maglaj had 'provoked bitterness among the Croat population', according to a report of the UNS.<sup>30</sup>

The evident collapse of the quisling state's authority during 1943 was readily apparent to ordinary Home Guards, who were forced to coexist with Chetniks who openly defied both the laws and the draft call of the NDH.<sup>31</sup> The Chetniks,

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like the Partisans, frequently sought to induce Home Guards to defect, and unlike the Partisans they did so while enjoying the protection of the Italians, prior to the latter's capitulation.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the Axis's collaborators undermined the authority of the NDH. Jevđević's claim that 90 per cent of Communists captured by the Chetniks were former Home Guards was a lie that contained a grain of truth, for a large section of Home Guard opinion was deeply hostile both to the Ustashas and to the Germans and ready to collaborate with their enemies. The UNS reported in April 1943 that in Trebinje in Hercegovina, the Home Guard officers were 'almost all Serbophile and Anglophile'.<sup>33</sup>

In some areas Chetnik atrocities and NDH passivity began to turn the Muslim population towards the Partisans, whose propaganda naturally emphasised these grievances.<sup>34</sup> The Staff of the Partisans' 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps on 16 July 1943 reported that in the Šiprage municipality, a massacre of prominent Muslims by the Chetniks was 'the source of a great ferment in the Muslim villages'. Muslims who had up till then been unwilling to actively support the Partisans were now seeking out the latter to ask for weapons with which to fight the Chetniks. The Partisans were responding by arming the Muslims and organising them into local legions to further polarise their relations with the Chetniks and mobilise them gradually into the NOP.<sup>35</sup> At this stage, Muslim entry into the Partisans nevertheless remained limited, with large sections of the Muslim population still reserved or hostile. At Jeleč in the Zelengora region the Muslim and Serb populations even formed an alliance for armed resistance to the Partisans.<sup>36</sup> The Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment reported in late April 1943 that although the Croat and Muslim inhabitants of Hercegovina and Dalmatia were not well disposed toward the NDH, their support for the Partisans was also falling.<sup>37</sup> The unpopularity of the Ustasha regime among the Muslims had not yet translated into mass support for the Partisans.

The collapse of the NDH's defences at the local level and the expansion of Partisan activity following the capitulation of Italy in September 1943 increased the Muslim population's, and to a lesser extent the Croat population's, discontent with the NDH's inability to defend it. The Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment reported on 25 October:

The disposition of the Croat-Hercegovinian section of the population toward the state and its Supreme Authority is not of the requisite level. The reason for this is strong Partisan activity that in the recent period has reached its peak, and the fact that we do not have enough forces of our own to protect the population and guarantee it security of person and property. Given this situation, there is felt among the Croat part of the population—particularly among the Muslims—a desire for self-defence; they avoid service in the Home Guard and endeavour with all their energies to remain at home, to defend their villages from within the ranks of the militia or the Domdo forces against rebel attacks. This has occurred particularly in the recent period from when the Chetnik leaders gained the confidence of the Germans, who have permitted them to fight jointly, and permitted Chetnik units to participate in the actions against the Partisan-Communist bands. This is one of the main causes of why among the Croat population morale is not at the requisite level. The population is in a state of fear, for it was these very Chetniks who caused them a lot of grief while they were collaborating with the Italian forces in the so-called anti-Partisan actions.<sup>38</sup>



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### *The Nazi turn towards the Great Serbs*

Allied forces invaded Sicily on 10 July 1943, prompting the Fascist Grand Council to pass a vote of no confidence in Mussolini, after which King Victor Emmanuel III removed the Duce from power. The new government under Marshal Pietro Badoglio immediately began preparations to withdraw Italy from the Axis, beginning negotiations with the Allies in early August. The Italian forces in Yugoslavia consequently became increasingly inactive, culminating in their formal capitulation in September. Their collapse proved the decisive turning point in the Partisans' rise. In Bosnia-Herzegovina alone the Partisans liberated thirteen towns during late August and September and seventeen during October.<sup>39</sup> But more important than the capture of territory was the growth in the size of the Partisan movement. In the Italian-annexed parts of Slovenia and Dalmatia, the newly created power vacuum immediately favoured the Partisans, who had been operating in these territories since 1941 and were now handed an open field. Between June and December 1943, the number of Slovene Partisan brigades rose from 6 to 18 and the number of Dalmatian Partisan brigades from 2 to 13, all predominantly ethnic-Croat. In the rest of Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Serbs formed a solid majority of Partisans, the expansion was less spectacular but still considerable: from 17 to 25 brigades in Croatia proper and from 14 to 23 brigades in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For the first time, in Yugoslavia as a whole the majority of Partisans were non-Serbs.

The importance of this may be gleaned from the fact that of 97 Partisan brigades in existence by the end of 1943, 38 were from Croatia and 23 from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Of the 38 Croatian Partisan brigades, 20 had an ethnic-Croat majority, 17 an ethnic-Serb majority and one an ethnic-Czech majority. At this time, the whole of eastern Yugoslavia (Vojvodina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia) was contributing only 18 Partisan brigades.<sup>40</sup> Of the four Partisan corps formed before the autumn of 1943, two were Croatian and two Bosnian. At this time, Tito reorganised his army into eight corps; of these, three were Croatian (the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Corps); two were Bosnian (the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>), one was Montenegrin (the 2<sup>nd</sup>), one was Slovene (the 7<sup>th</sup>), and the last was the all-Yugoslav 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Corps. NDH military intelligence estimated in this period that the two Bosnian Corps that together comprised the overwhelming majority of all Bosnian Partisans were 70 per cent per cent Serb and 30 per cent per cent Croat and Muslim by late 1943.<sup>41</sup> During the entire course of the NOP (1941–45), 64.1 per cent per cent of all Bosnian Partisans were Serbs, 23 per cent were Muslims and 8.8 per cent Croats.<sup>42</sup> The Croat and Muslim contribution to the NOP was therefore very significant, amounting to over a quarter of all Yugoslav Partisans and about a third of all Bosnian Partisans at the time of the second session of AVNOJ in November 1943. It was this multinational composition, more than victories on the battlefield, that held the key to the Partisans' eventual triumph.

The Italians were widely hated among the Bosnian Muslims as protectors of the Chetniks, and the fall of Mussolini was greeted with warm satisfaction by a large section of the Sarajevo Muslim population.<sup>43</sup> Yet it was clear to the Muslims that the fall of their Italian enemy created new problems and dangers. Conversely, these were times of hope for the Serb-nationalist right. The capitulation of Italy



and the growing pressure on the Germans on several fronts brought about a change in the latter's attitude towards the Chetniks and the Serb nation generally, with which they were now more ready to collaborate on a common anti-Communist basis. Nedić, meanwhile, had spent the first half of 1943 preparing for an eventual summons to visit Hitler, when he would be able to put before the latter his territorial demands. His ambition stretched to most of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Sanjak, eastern Slavonia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Baranja. On 18 September Nedić met Hitler and requested the annexation of Montenegro, the Sanjak, East Bosnia, Srem and Kosovo-Metohija. On this occasion Ribbentrop opposed Nedić's demands and, following a confrontation between the two, Hitler was forced to appease Nedić by promising him concessions elsewhere. Hermann Neubacher, Special Plenipotentiary of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, was sent to Belgrade with the task of strengthening the Nedić regime and establishing a working relationship with Mihailović's Chetniks. Neubacher worked to unite the forces of Nedić, Mihailović and the Serbian fascist leader Dimitrije Ljotić into a common front against the Partisans. The Wehrmacht's Command South East renewed or concluded a series of pacts with Chetnik commanders across the NDH, Serbia and Montenegro. A new puppet 'Provisional National Administration' was established in Montenegro. A battalion of the Serbian Volunteer Corps under Nedić's former minister Mihailo Olčan was sent to the Sanjak. The Germans released from captivity Pavle Đurišić, who was sent to the Sanjak to organise pro-Nedić Chetnik forces and the following spring was appointed head of a new 'Montenegrin Volunteer Force' loyal to Nedić.

The Germans considered the establishment of some form of Great Serbia. Neubacher broadly supported Nedić's goal of an expanded Serbia within the framework of the German order. His project, which he put before von Ribbentrop in October, was for a 'Great Serbian Federation' which would consist of Serbia, Montenegro and the Sanjak and to which would eventually be added East Bosnia up to the River Bosna. Nedić was to receive a greater degree of control over the civilian administration of Serbia and a 'Serbian army' was to be formed from the Serb prisoners of war in German camps. As Neubacher said after the war: 'With Nedić strong in such a Serbia it would have been possible to defeat Tito in Serbia, Sanjak and Montenegro without the use of a single German soldier; the Serbian nationalists would have done the job for them.'<sup>44</sup> In November Hitler examined the plan with some sympathy, but ultimately rejected it for fear of strengthening and encouraging Serbian expansionism. According to Hitler, the Serbs 'have shown a great state-forming strength and possess goals of conquest that stretch to the Aegean Sea'. At the same time Neubacher's efforts to strengthen the Nedić regime were obstructed by other figures in the Nazi administration in Serbia who were unwilling to turn over any of their powers to Nedić.

Both before and during his negotiations with Hitler and Neubacher, Nedić had attempted to expand his influence into East Bosnia through arming and organising Bosnian Chetnik bands. Meanwhile, Mihailović planned to seize East Bosnia in the autumn of 1943 through a mobilisation of the Serb population. For this purpose the Chetniks mobilised two corps in East Bosnia, the Drina and Romanija Corps, under the respective commands of Dragoslav Račić and Milorad Momčilović. They then proceeded to capture large areas of East Bosnia, including

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several towns. On 5 October the Chetniks attacked Višegrad, which they captured after fierce fighting against the Ustasas, Home Guards and Muslim militia. This was followed by the Chetnik massacre of over two thousand Višegrad Muslim civilians, despite the efforts of Višegrad Serbs to protect and hide their Muslim neighbours.<sup>45</sup> On 14 October the Chetniks captured Rogatica, whose Muslim population had mostly evacuated the town in anticipation. The Chetniks slaughtered the few remaining Muslim civilians, as well as Partisan sympathisers from among the Serb population and burned down a large part of the town. The Chetnik offensive was accompanied by propaganda and agitation for a Serb national struggle against both Partisans and Ustasas and for the annexation of East Bosnia to Nedić's Serbia or to Montenegro.<sup>46</sup>

These atrocities resulted in a new wave of Muslim refugees fleeing to Sarajevo and other Bosnian towns, where the local inhabitants drew the appropriate conclusion. As one Bosnian Muslim wrote somewhat cynically in a letter to a friend at this time:

The renewed slaughter of our people in Višegrad has disturbed spirits here as never before... It is tragic to watch the columns of refugees, poor and shabby, as they traverse the streets of the city. Wherever one looks there is suffering, so that one's heart bursts from the pain of it. These sad scenes have warmed the stony hearts of the Sarajevans; when it has got to this you can imagine how things look.<sup>47</sup>

So desperate did even prominent Sarajevo Muslims feel at this stage that some began to discuss the possibility of evacuating the entire Bosnian Muslim population to Turkey.<sup>48</sup>

The Great Serbian threat was therefore ever present in the minds of the Muslim population, constantly reinforced by periodic Chetnik massacres of civilians. During September, the renewed mobilisation of Chetniks in the Sarajevo region coincided with the spread of rumours among the city's population that Hitler had promised Nedić the annexation of East Bosnia, Sanjak and part of Hercegovina to Serbia.<sup>49</sup> In response to such rumours the UNS reported that 'the Serbs are increasingly joining the Chetniks' while 'the Muslims are increasingly worried by these new actions of the Chetniks, seeing in them a danger directed against themselves...'<sup>50</sup> In the small town of Pale outside Sarajevo, seat of a well organised Chetnik band, rumours circulated among the Serb population that Nedićite and Chetnik forces from Serbia would seize East Bosnia in conjunction with local Chetniks and 'eradicate the entire Croat population from these parts.'<sup>51</sup> Rumours of this kind inevitably spread far afield; the false claims that the Germans had promised Nedić East Bosnia and were allowing Draža Mihailović himself to operate in Pale reached as far as Turkey.<sup>52</sup> In January 1944 the UNS reported that 'the people of Bosnia have been talking a lot recently about how 30,000 of Nedić's Chetniks will enter Bosnia from Serbia and about how the border between Croatia and Serbia will be moved to the River Bosna. Naturally, this has provoked fear among the Croats and rejoicing among the Serbs'.<sup>53</sup>

The widespread Muslim warmth towards the Germans prior to the autumn of 1943 was a product of their fear of the Great Serbian threat. According to a report from the German 114<sup>th</sup> Hunting Division in April 1943: 'The Muslims are in large part amicably disposed towards the Axis. They say of this, that the defeat of Ger-

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many would mean their ruin, because in the new Great Serbia they would not be able to achieve their right.' Furthermore, 'The political goal of the Muslims is the autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some express the will also to be a German protectorate.'<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the German turn towards increased collaboration with the Chetniks and quisling Serbia heightened the Muslim alienation from all Axis and quisling factions. According to one Ustasha source of this period:

German military officials have worked skilful plots and manoeuvres with the Chetnik representatives, and have at the expense of the prestige of the Croatian State and the Croatian state authorities defended the Chetniks and in ways and on occasions when they should not have done so. The Chetniks have exploited to the full this authorised position and have acted openly against our population, killing and plundering our defenceless people. Our Croatian state authorities, despite their best intentions, were unable, on account of the said German support and protection, to offer an effective defence to our population and enact the deserved retribution against the Chetnik criminals.

Chetnik officers were arriving from Serbia to reinforce and reorganise the Bosnian Chetnik forces, all with the complicity of the German authorities.<sup>55</sup> A UNS report noted in mid September: 'The Chetniks endeavour to show to the Germans that many Croats are Partisans. The Chetniks' standing with the Germans is now high.' Consequently, 'Among the Croatian population there is anger at the Germans on account of their support for the Chetniks.'<sup>56</sup>

Across Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Muslim and Croat population reacted negatively to the German turn towards the Chetniks. In August the NDH police uncovered an underground Chetnik organisation in Sarajevo that was planning to take power in the town in the event that the British Army landed on the Croatian coast. The Germans intervened to secure the release of the Chetnik leaders, prompting the UNS to report that 'the release of these Serbs has resulted in a great deal of discontent among the Croatian citizens, and all are wondering how far this will go and when there will be an end to such leniency'.<sup>57</sup> In Nevesinje in eastern Herzegovina, the Germans struck an agreement with the local Chetniks and 'this agreement provoked a great sense of dissatisfaction among the local Muslim population', while in the village of Fazlagića Kula near Gacko 'a great deal of dissatisfaction is reigning due to the renewed arming of the Chetniks by the Germans', according to a report of the UNS.<sup>58</sup> The Nevesinje Muslims were particularly embittered by the refusal of the Germans to arm local Muslim militias, even while they armed the Chetniks.<sup>59</sup> In Mostar, the Chetniks were well organised and enjoyed close relations with the German command.<sup>60</sup> The Germans in Mostar also conducted negotiations with armed Chetnik commanders from the surrounding areas, whose arrival in the city was warmly welcomed by a section of the town's Serb and Muslim population.<sup>61</sup> At this time in Mostar there was an 'extremely widespread anti-state propaganda, partly Anglophile and partly Partisan in spirit, but in general united against the NDH'.<sup>62</sup>

According to a report from the command of the Wehrmacht's 15<sup>th</sup> Mountain Army Corps at the start of October: 'The earlier jubilation of the population has been transformed into a negative and partly also a hostile stance toward the German Wehrmacht.' Furthermore: 'Through its poor economic and Ustasha policies, the government has lost every basis of support, not only among the Orthodox and

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Muslims but also among the Croat population. The government has real influence only in some of the larger towns. The power and authority of the state no longer exist.' The Muslims gave no support to the NDH:

circles of Muslim intellectuals want either an independent state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which the corresponding nationalities would hold the territorial administration, and the Muslims would with a corresponding percentage participate in the government and would not depend on the arbitrary government in Zagreb as they have up till now, or they want a protectorate under which the military administration would have a corresponding possibility for development and activity.

Meanwhile, 'Among the Catholic population, the reception of Serbian Prime Minister Nedić at the Führer's General Staff has awakened panic that the Führer has made Nedić a particular promise for Serbia.'<sup>63</sup>

The top Partisan leadership, for its part, made every effort to court the Muslim population on an anti-Chetnik basis in this period, as a couple of high-profile interventions made clear. In July 1943 the Zenica Chetnik leader Golub Mitrović and his staff were captured at Bijela Voda by the 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Brigade and were taken as prisoners to the Supreme Staff's base. KPJ Central Committee member Moša Pijade personally addressed the population of the locality on the subject of Chetnik treachery, and read to them the text of Mitrović's pact with the Ustashes, which had been discovered during the capture. Eleven local Chetnik leaders, including Mitrović, were sentenced to death and executed for two crimes: killing Partisans and killing innocent local Muslims.<sup>64</sup> A month later the Supreme Staff arrived in Šerići, another village in the Zenica region, where the local Muslim militia had a history of collaboration with the NOP, and on one occasion had helped to rescue a Partisan brigade from encirclement by the Germans. Tito spoke warmly to the villagers, and presented the militia—formally part of the enemy's forces—with a machine gun with which to defend their village from the Chetniks.<sup>65</sup> This apparently impressed even the British agents attached to the Supreme Staff. As Vladimir Dedijer noted: 'I see a change in the English themselves. They are surprised by how well we live with the Muslims.'<sup>66</sup> The Partisans were, in fact, attempting to step in as the Muslims' protectors, just as the Ustashes' reputation in this regard was increasingly tarnished.

### *The 13th SS Division 'Handschar' as a catalyst to the Muslim revolt*

The Muslim population of north-east Bosnia remained, during the winter, spring and summer of 1942–43, reserved in its attitude to the still predominantly Serb Partisans. Although overall not hostile to the latter and in some places sympathetic to them, the north-east Bosnian Muslims were less active in the People's Liberation Movement than their fellow Muslims in the western part of the country. They remained mobilised in the Hadžiefendić legion, the Muslim militia and the Ustashes, with the Muslim elite retaining its influence over the Muslim masses.<sup>67</sup> In some areas in the region the Muslim militias continued to attack Partisan units, prompting the Staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade to threaten the Muslim villages of the Tuzla-Zvornik region that 'either you will cease your attacks on the Partisan army or you will be destroyed'.<sup>68</sup> In general, however, the Muslim militias

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adopted a live-and-let-live policy towards the Partisans, sometimes engaging in low-level collaboration with them, but refraining from joining them. In the words of the senior East Bosnian Communist Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo:

We most frequently passed through their villages without a struggle; sometimes they would also do us various services; in some places we had greater influence, and had our people in leading positions in those formations, but we could not draw those formations or the more significant parts of them into joint actions, or into joining our ranks.<sup>69</sup>

Occasionally a Muslim militia would agree to join the Partisans, but only on condition that it could remain in its village to guard its population against the Chetniks. The Partisans, for their part, reciprocated by tolerating the Muslim militias and allowing them to retain their weapons. Yet during 1943 the Muslim attitude rapidly changed under the combined impact of Chetnik genocide, NDH collapse and the formation of the Handschar Division; this brought the Muslim militias towards the Partisans.

Hadžiefendić appears to have hoped his Legion would form the nucleus of a Muslim army that would enable Bosnia-Herzegovina to achieve autonomy. Hence he was ready to transfer his hopes to the Handschar Division as a more powerful Muslim armed force inspired by the autonomist ideal. Yet in this instance the ambitions of the Muslim autonomists and the desire of ordinary Muslims simply to protect their homes diverged, for the Handschar Division was a regular military unit that could not play the role of local defence force for the north-east Bosnian Muslims. The authorities' efforts to recruit members of the Domdo forces for the Handschar Division thus acted as a catalyst for the NOP's subversion of the former. The Communists in Tuzla waged a propaganda campaign to dissuade Domdo officers from joining the Handschar Division. NOP activists carried out agitation at rallies of Hadžiefendić's Legion outside mosques and at other places and occasions at which Muslims publicly gathered. Activity of this kind provided the occasion for the establishment of links between Vladimir Perić-Valter, KPJ instructor in Tuzla, and Omer Gluhić, Hadžiefendić's adjutant.<sup>70</sup> Hadžiefendić therefore supported the establishment of the Handschar Division at the expense of his political standing among his officers and rank and file, many of whom consequently turned towards the Partisans. The recruitment of volunteers for the Handschar Division also had a harmful effect on the Home Guards as well as on the Ustashes, many of whom abandoned their units to join the better-paid SS.<sup>71</sup>

In response to the threat posed to the Muslims of north-east Bosnia by the formation of the Handschar Division, on some date between 7 and 10 May 1943 a number of officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Domdo battalion in Bijeljina defected to the Partisans. Four of these—Lieutenant Daut Filipović, Lieutenant Osman Gruhonjić, Enver Zaimović<sup>72</sup> and Hilmija Šahinpašić—issued a proclamation calling upon their fellow Domdo soldiers to do likewise and denouncing the alleged intention of the Germans to send Bosnian Muslims to fight on the Russian front. The defection of these officers had been achieved by the Local Committee of the KPJ for Bijeljina, which enjoyed direct and close contact with them.<sup>73</sup> At about the same time another group of Domdo officers and soldiers from Gračanica in Majevica defected: Reserve Lieutenants Vahid Begić and Adem Osmanbegović, the *kadi* Ahmed Žunić and the veterinarian Hasan Maglajlić. The following day, Reserve

Lieutenant Salih Žilić defected from his base to the north-west of Tuzla to the Partisans, along with Professor Meša Selimović (subsequently the great novelist) and nine other Domdo men. Finally, Gluhić and two other Domdo men defected to the Partisans. Some of these Domdo officers then issued a second proclamation calling upon their former comrades to defect from the Domdo legion; its signatories included Gluhić, Žilić, Begić, Osmanbegović, Selimović and Ensign Hilmija Zaimović, as well as a number of Muslim NOP activists and agents. The proclamation was signed by the former Ustasha officer Enver Mešković and a total of eight former Domdo officers.

The defections of the legionnaires revealed the unwillingness of the Muslims of north-east Bosnia either to fight for the NDH or to join the SS. The defection of Hadžiefendić's adjutant Gluhić was particularly damaging and provoked the NDH's dismissal of Hadžiefendić himself.<sup>74</sup> This in turn discredited the NDH further, divided the Muslim autonomists among themselves and prepared the terrain for the Partisans' adoption of the autonomist mantle.<sup>75</sup> As the Ustashes came increasingly to view the Muslim legions with distrust and hostility, so the latter became ever less willing to fight on the Ustasha side or to resist the Partisans. A UNS report of August 1943 noted that the Domdo legion had largely lost the will to fight and that 'some legionnaires are going over to the side of the Partisans'. The report concludes:

The Muslims have lost faith in the Germans and recently are losing it in Croatia. All Muslim actions are founded on a religious basis and it is understandable that they are full of mistrust of the Catholic Croats. On that religious basis, on which that legion is also based, '*vla*chs' and '*šoka*cs' [i.e. Serbs and Croats] are all the same. We must be clear about this! They are just Muslims, who today are wearing the crescent and star as signs of the pan-Islamic movement.<sup>76</sup>

When the Partisan Chief Operational Group attacked Kladanj on 27–28 June, the town's Muslim legion abandoned it to the Partisans without a struggle.<sup>77</sup> The Partisans, under the leadership of Tito himself, refrained from plundering Kladanj, though according to the UNS report they did plunder the surrounding area.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile the Kladanj legionnaires retreated to Živinice where they ceased to act as a disciplined force, instead expressing highly defeatist and anti-Ustasha sentiments and engaging in acts of plunder and violence against the local population.<sup>79</sup> The Kladanj legion commander Avdaga Hasić was later found to have been in league with the Partisans during their attack on Kladanj.<sup>80</sup> The company commander in the village of Seona near Tuzla, Muhamed Hukić, defected with four other Home Guards to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian Division on 5 July.<sup>81</sup> At the end of July, the Partisans attacking the well-defended Home Guard garrison of Begov Han appealed to the Home Guards: 'Brother Home Guards, we call upon you not to fight but to surrender to us.' The Home Guards thereupon surrendered to the Partisans without a struggle.<sup>82</sup>

The Partisan leadership from the start, as we have seen, did not view the Home Guard and militia as *a priori* enemies but as unredeemed parts of the nation. The Supreme Staff intended to facilitate the Chief Operational Group's move into East Bosnia in the summer of 1943 with a general propaganda offensive to induce the crumbling quisling formations to go over *en masse* to the NOP. On 1–2 July, at

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the Muslim village of Plahovići near Kladanj, Tito conferred with the Provincial Committee of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Operational Staff of Vojvodina to discuss the situation in East Bosnia and Vojvodina. The 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and 1<sup>st</sup> Majeveca Brigades and part of the Majeveca Detachment were formed into the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division, the first division formed by the East Bosnian Partisans. This division was formed to encompass the Croats and Muslims whom Tito correctly expected would shortly be entering the Partisan ranks en masse. Tito ordered in addition that a Muslim Partisan brigade be formed in the near future to accelerate the mobilisation of the Muslim population. Finally, Provincial Committee Secretary Iso Jovanović was transferred from Party duty in Bosnia-Herzegovina to become Organisational Secretary to the KPJ organisation of his native Vojvodina. Tito expressed full satisfaction with his record.<sup>83</sup> Jovanović was replaced by Rodoljub Čolaković, who assumed the role of Political Secretary of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the same time, the Supreme Staff empowered the Bosnian KPJ leaders Čolaković and Jovanović as well as Pavle Jakšić (Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Banija Division) to hold talks in its name and on the basis of its instructions with the Home Guards of East Bosnia. In Tito's words: 'For the purpose of destabilisation and destruction of the Independent State of Croatia, as well as the destruction of the civil authorities in the NDH, it is necessary to establish as close contact as possible with all representatives of the civil and military authorities that are inclined towards us.' In order to induce defections to the Partisans from among the Home Guards, 'every officer or NCO who joins the People's Liberation Army is to be guaranteed the rank that he held up to that time and to be enabled further advancement as well as a position appropriate to his rank and capability'. Home Guard officers unwilling to surrender their garrisons to the Partisans openly without a struggle were to be allowed to surrender following a staged battle.<sup>84</sup> Through the subversion of the Home Guard, the Communists aimed both 'to destroy the Ustasha civilian and military authorities' and to 'obtain Home Guard soldiers and officers—at least the lower-ranking ones—for the People's Liberation Army'.<sup>85</sup>

The Partisans came increasingly to treat those Muslim militias not actively mobilised against them as potential allies, which involved a shift from their previous hostility towards these forces. The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Majeveca resolved in September 1943 that the Partisan policy of indiscriminately disarming all Muslim militias had been erroneous, as it exposed the Muslim population to Chetnik terror and strengthened the hand of the Muslim reactionaries. It called for greater flexibility towards the militias.<sup>86</sup> As Asim Mujkić, appointed in August as political commissar to the newly formed Muslim Battalion, recalls:

We did not at the time demand the disarming of the Domdo regiments; rather we endeavoured to persuade individuals, armed and on a voluntary basis, to join the units of the NOVJ, or to put themselves at the disposal of the People's Liberation Councils, which we formed wherever the circumstances permitted. In this way, through our presence in the villages, correct behaviour toward the people and the political activity of the Party and the SKOJ, we guaranteed the voluntary entry into units of the NOVJ of youth or 'legionnaires', as the conscripts of the Domdo regiments called themselves.<sup>87</sup>

As the Chief Operational Group advanced into East Bosnia, the Home Guard garrison of Zvornik requested negotiations and offered to surrender peacefully.



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Nevertheless, the vacillation of the Zvornik garrison over its surrender led Tito to break off negotiations and order an assault on the town on 4 July. The 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Brigade captured Zvornik, greatly assisted by the collection of military information by NOP activists in the town, among whom was the legionnaire Mahmut Hodžić.<sup>88</sup> In late July 1943 the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division captured Gradačac in the region of Posavina. The Muslim Legion's commander Ibrahim Duglodić was a KPJ member and withdrew his forces from the town without a struggle, while the Home Guard company, among whose officers was Lieutenant Lujo Bauer, also a KPJ member, for the most part surrendered readily. The District Chief in Gradačac, Mustafa Rustembegović, was himself an NOP sympathiser and subsequently President of the Okrug NOO for Trebava and Posavina.<sup>89</sup>

While the NOP gained steam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, troops of the Handschar Division stationed in the town of Villefranche-de-Rouergue in southern France staged a futile but spectacular mutiny in September 1943, a precursor of larger revolts to come back home. The Division's long period of organisation and training in Germany and France meant its removal from Bosnian soil, leaving its soldiers' homes undefended from the Chetnik threat. At the same time the Muslim and Croat officers and soldiers resented their subordinate position vis-à-vis the German officers. Among the Croat troops of the Division, there was dissatisfaction at its Muslim autonomist character and at German favouritism towards the Muslims; desertions among Croats were therefore higher than among Muslims.<sup>90</sup>

The Home Guard officer Ferid Džanić went over to the Partisans in the autumn of 1942 and served loyally in the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade. Captured by the Germans during the Fourth Enemy Offensive, he escaped from military prison and joined the Handschar Division to become a lieutenant. He was subsequently a ringleader of the rebellion at Villefranche-de-Rouergue. Another ringleader was Božo Jelenek, an NOP collaborator from 1941 who had been particularly involved in recruiting Muslims to the Partisans.<sup>91</sup> However, subversion within the Division did not come only from collaborators of the Communists. A third ringleader, nineteen-year-old Nikola Vukelić, claimed following the suppression of the rebellion that he was 'fanatical for a new Croatia under Kvaternik, allied to Great Britain and the United States', and for 'the removal of the Poglavnik, Dr Ante Pavelić'.<sup>92</sup> The fourth ringleader, Lutfija Dizdarević, was a Muslim from Sarajevo about whom little is known.

Džanić began to form his rebel cell within the Division in July 1943 when the latter was stationed in Germany. There he came into contact with Jelenek, while Vukelić would join them following the Division's transfer to southern France, which was completed by August 1943. The unit of the Division in which the leading conspirators were enrolled, the SS Mountain Pioneer Battalion 13, was stationed at the town of Villefranche-de-Rouergue. The Croat and Muslim troops and officers were discontented on account of harsh discipline, poor rations and subjection to forced labour. They were humiliated and physically abused by their German superiors. From 7 September the inferiority of the Croat and Muslim officers was rubbed in their faces when their living quarters were moved to the barracks while the German officers remained quartered in a hotel in the town.<sup>93</sup> Reports of German and Ustasha atrocities against Muslim civilians from time to time filtered back to the Bosnian troops in France, including the Ustasha massacre



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of Muslim civilians at Srebrenica and the German mass execution of Muslim peasants near Goražde, Sokolac and Mostar in the summer of 1943.<sup>94</sup>

The rebellion began on 17 September 1943 in response to news that the Division was to be transferred back to Germany, which was presumed to be a prelude to its relocation on the Russian front. It involved about 500 Muslim and Croat troops and five German officers were executed by the rebels.<sup>95</sup> The tide turned against the mutineers, however, thanks to the intervention of the battalion imam, Halim Malkoč, who led a counter-uprising.<sup>96</sup> Estimates of the number of Muslim and Croat SS troops killed by the Germans during and after the suppression of the rebellion range from about twenty to 200. A further 825 troops of the Handschar Division were 'purged' as unreliable and sent to Dachau concentration camp.<sup>97</sup> Jelenek, the only one of the four ringleaders to survive the suppression of the rebellion, escaped to join the French Maquis, for which he was decorated. In late 1944 he and about six hundred other Yugoslav fighters in the Maquis were transported back to Yugoslavia, where they participated in the final Partisan operations to liberate the country.<sup>98</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Bosnia, the Muslim SS soldiers' relatives were on the receiving end of rebel violence, against which the occupiers and NDH offered insufficient protection. In January 1944 Himmler's plenipotentiary in Croatia, Konstantin Kammerhofer, reported to him that there were about 210,000 Bosnian refugees, the majority of them Muslims, including 'at least 80,000 family-members of members of the SS and volunteers in the police'; 'The situation of these people is the worst that can be imagined.'<sup>99</sup> The Bosnian SS soldiers, cowed and discontented and their families suffering, were another wing of the occupation apparatus ripe for subversion by the NOP.

### *The 16th Muslim Brigade*

The success of the NOP in co-opting members of the Muslim Legions prompted the Bosnian Partisan command to form a specifically Muslim Partisan unit that would act as a magnet for recruiting members of the Legion. In early July, Čolaković informed Tito of his intention to form a Muslim Partisan battalion as a nucleus for a future Muslim brigade in order to mobilise the Muslims of north-eastern Bosnia and replenish the ranks of the East Bosnian Partisans.<sup>100</sup> On 8 August the Staff of the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division ordered the formation of a Muslim battalion within the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade 'for political reasons and with the perspective of soon establishing a Muslim brigade'. Its members were to be drawn from the Muslim fighters of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and Majevisa Brigades and of the Majevisa Detachment and its command and rank and file were to be all-Muslim.<sup>101</sup> The Muslim battalion was established the following day at the hamlet of Točak on the road between Brčko and Bijeljina and its sixty-four fighters were mostly drawn from these two municipalities.<sup>102</sup> Its deputy commander was the former Muslim legionnaire Enver Zaimović. The battalion travelled between Muslim villages to mobilise recruits. A second Muslim battalion was soon after established within the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigade. On 21 September the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Muslim Brigade (from 17 October renamed the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade) was established at the village of Bukvik in Posavina. Its kernel was made up of Muslim

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Image 1: 'Anniversary of the 16th Muslim Brigade', published on 21 September 1944.

fighters of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and 15<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigades, around which were mobilised Muslims of the Posavina and Majevisa regions.

The purpose of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade, as one of its veterans wrote twenty-eight years later, was to ‘demonstrate more strongly the Muslim individuality in the revolutionary struggle and the establishment of Bosnian–Hercegovinian statehood in the future community of Yugoslav peoples’.<sup>103</sup> It was established above all to attract and mobilise the Muslim population of East Bosnia. During World War II, a total of 3,382 fighters served in the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade, three quarters of them joining in the period 1943–44. As it grew larger the Brigade—initially 90 per cent Muslim—lost its overwhelmingly Muslim composition as the Partisans became more confident in their policy. By the end of the war 58 per cent of those who had fought in its ranks were Muslims, 32 per cent Serbs and 5 per cent Albanians, with smaller numbers of Croats and others.<sup>104</sup> Yet it was always designated a ‘Muslim’ brigade in order to have an impact on the Muslim population of East Bosnia and in February 1944 the Staff of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division

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refused to dismiss the Brigade's incompetent commander, despite his poor performance during the Sixth Enemy Offensive, because no other sufficiently senior Muslim was available to replace him.<sup>105</sup>

The political and ethnic character of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade enabled it to draw strength and sustenance from the same Muslim population in East Bosnia that, so far as the Chetniks were concerned, formed a barrier to their Great Serb plans. For while Chetnik units could not pass through Muslim-inhabited territories without first fighting and crushing the local Muslim militias, the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade drew strength from its presence among them. The unit originally numbered 350 fighters organised in two battalions. These were seasoned fighters and leadership cadres who had fought within other units since the start of the uprising. During the autumn the Partisans of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps held a series of meetings in Posavina, following which a large number of youth joined the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian, 1<sup>st</sup> Majevisa and Muslim Brigades.<sup>106</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade participated in the liberation of Tuzla in the autumn of 1943; following this its ranks were filled by the youth, miners and other workers of Tuzla and it rose in size to number four battalions.<sup>107</sup> Shortly after the liberation of the town, Čolaković described the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade as a 'solid military unit that acquitted itself excellently in the battles for Tuzla'.<sup>108</sup> Of course, the unit's national character was a double-edged sword: the Political Commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Shock Division, to which the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade was attached, reported in November 1943 that the Chetniks in the Romanija region were using the presence there of a Muslim Partisan brigade to mobilise local Serbs into their ranks on an anti-Muslim basis, and at the same time that the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade was unable to replenish its ranks because the Muslim villages of Romanija had been emptied of their inhabitants. The Political Commissar recommended the Division's relocation to the Zenica region, where the Muslim Brigade would be able to recruit local Muslims.<sup>109</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade took part in the liberation of Vareš on 22 October and Sokolac on 30 October. In the battle for Vareš, the son of the town's richest Muslim businessman participated as a commander on the Partisan side.<sup>110</sup> The Muslim militias and Home Guards in the region put up little or no resistance, with forty militiamen from the village of Budoželja near Vareš joining the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade. In Vareš, the Home Guard officers abandoned the town without a struggle and without even informing their garrison. On this occasion two Home Guard lieutenants joined the Partisans. Following the start of the German operations against the Partisans known subsequently as the 'Sixth Enemy Offensive', the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade liberated Kladanj on 9 December and participated in the failed Partisan offensive to recapture Tuzla in January. That month the Muslim battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigade was incorporated within it. Retreating across Majevisa and Posavina, the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade replenished its ranks from the Muslim villages of its native region. In March it entered the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division and moved with it to the region of Foča and Goražde, where it began to mobilise the Muslim population to the Partisan cause before moving on to Montenegro and the Sanjak. Following its return to Eastern Bosnia in July 1944, the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade participated in the second liberation of Tuzla.<sup>111</sup> On 30 November, in conjunction with the 20<sup>th</sup> Romanija Brigade, it destroyed a German motorised column in the vicinity of Sjemeč near Rogatica.<sup>112</sup>

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### *The revolt of the Muslim Legions and Home Guards*

In the summer and autumn of 1943, the trickle of defections from Muslim and Croat quisling forces to the Partisans in East Bosnia turned into a flood and the Ustasha state crumbled. On 11 June the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> Karlovac Regiment, a Home Guard regiment composed of Croats from Croatia, surrendered without a struggle to the Partisans at the village of Donji Čadavići on the road between Brčko and Bijeljina, thanks to NOP agitation within its ranks. The surrender was arranged by two members of the regiment's staff who had been in league with the Brčko Local Committee of the KPJ. The Home Guard prisoners were allowed to return unharmed to Brčko, which caused a corresponding drop in the garrison's willingness to resist the Partisans.<sup>113</sup> On 3 October the commander of the Brčko Home Guard garrison, Božidar Mileusnić, was himself arrested as an NOP agent along with one of his officers; they had been planning to assist a Partisan attack on the town by disarming the Ustasas.<sup>114</sup>

The Partisan capture of the village of Puračić between Doboj and Tuzla on 18 August was achieved in cooperation with the Muslim militia of Omer Gluhić, according to an NDH Interior Ministry Report. The hundred-strong unit went over to the Partisans with its commander and all its armaments. In the words of an NDH Interior Ministry report: 'In all sectors where the Muslim legion holds the positions in its hands, the Partisans cross without meeting the slightest resistance.'<sup>115</sup> In Puračić, according to a UNS report: 'The negative influence of the Muslim *čaršija* on the legionnaires is very great. That influence as well as Partisan propaganda has shaken their faith in themselves. Muslims frequently go over to the Partisans.'<sup>116</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division on 7 September captured the north Bosnian town of Modriča. Prior to the attack, the Municipal Committee of the KPJ for Modriča supplied the Partisans with full information on the numbers, armaments, positions and command cadre of the Modriča Home Guard garrison. The Municipal Committee had also formed links with officers of the latter who promised to surrender the town without a struggle. These officers were informed of when the attack was to take place and assured that the Home Guard offered no resistance: a single Partisan was killed in the operation and almost the entire garrison was captured, with the exception of the commander. Some of the Home Guard prisoners joined the Partisans, the others were released; in all, fifty new fighters joined the Muslim battalion at this time.<sup>117</sup>

The Partisans took Bijeljina on 12–13 August 1943 with the assistance of collaborators among the Muslim leaders and soldiers. The UNS reported that 'the Muslim element knew when the Partisans were to enter the town. The Legion did not fight at all, but surrendered in its bunkers. When the Partisans entered, the Muslims received them warmly and treated them to brandy.' Furthermore, both the mayor and the Ustasha commander in Bijeljina, Elez Dervišević and Muratbeg Pašić, respectively, collaborated with the Partisans before or during the attack. On this occasion, about three hundred citizens of Bijeljina, mostly Muslims, joined the Partisans.<sup>118</sup> The Partisans captured Bijeljina for a second time on 23–24 September 1943, once again with local Muslim assistance. As the Partisans approached the town members of the 5<sup>th</sup> Domdo Battalion, defending the outskirts of Bijeljina, abandoned their bunkers, hid their weapons and changed into civilian clothes. Members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion under the sergeant of the 8<sup>th</sup> Company Ibrahim

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Kamerić, on the basis of a prior agreement with the Partisans, abandoned their positions, forcing their commander to abandon the defences on the perimeter of the town and withdraw the garrison to barracks. All but one member of this Domdo battalion failed to turn up at the barracks as ordered.<sup>119</sup>

The Muslim Home Guard commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Artillery Complex in Brčko, Major Husein Krupić, defected to the Partisans in the second half of September. Two of his subordinates also deserted at this time and went underground in Tuzla with the aim of joining the Partisans.<sup>120</sup> When Zvornik was attacked by Chetniks dressed as Partisans in late September, 'the Legionnaires in Zvornik did not resist', according to the UNS.<sup>121</sup> At the end of October, the Staff of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division reported that in the vicinity of Goražde, Foča and Jabuka the attitude of the Muslim militias towards the Partisans was 'extremely favourable' and that 'some militiamen were spontaneously donning caps with the five-pointed star'; consequently, the Partisans had 'sent two responsible comrades with the task of preparing the terrain for the mobilisation of those militiamen into the ranks of our army'.<sup>122</sup>

Remarking on the evaporation of Muslim acquiescence in the Axis order, the Great Župan of Usora and Soli noted on 14 September 1943 that, following the capitulation of Italy and consequent Partisan successes, 'the morale of our population is noticeably and intensively falling'. Among the Muslims, the recruitment of members of the Domdo regiments into the Handschar Division was creating a negative reaction. Muslim men had joined the Domdo militia in order to avoid military service outside their native localities and to defend their homes and families from the Serb rebels: 'While the Muslim legionnaires go to fight in some other place, the Chetniks remain at home and are just waiting for the right opportunity to take revenge against the Muslim inhabitants of this region—killing, raping and plundering the neighbouring Muslim population.' This danger resulted in 'the flight of a number of officers and legionnaires to the Partisans', whereby

the Partisan ranks are strengthened morally rather than militarily, for those people, as the fighters first in line for the freedom of the Muslim population, are good promotional material for the Partisans among the ranks of the Muslims. Now those deserters from among the Home Guard officers are engaged in the surrounding villages, among the Muslim population they are familiar with, in extremely dangerous and successful publicity activities on behalf of the Partisans, which would not have happened if there had not been a military call-up for the SS forces from among the members of the Domdo regiment.<sup>123</sup>

Muslim alienation from the NDH was not confined to north-east Bosnia, manifesting itself across the country during the second half of 1943 and early 1944. The growing Muslim support for the NOP appears to have catalysed sections of the Muslim elite hostile to the latter to mobilise against the regime, for fear of losing influence to the Partisans. The Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina informed the Provincial Committee on 24 August that its policy was to favour the Muslim militia: 'The stance towards the Muslim militia needs to be friendly, to worsen relations between them and the Chetniks. The disarming of the Muslim militia, as well as certain broad actions against Muslim villages, are today not in line with our stance toward the Muslims.' Yet such a policy did not go unchallenged on the part of the Communists' Muslim rivals:

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In the larger towns, there has come about a gathering of the Muslim *čaršija* and uncompromised begs as well as that part of the Muslim intelligentsia that has not stood on our side. Those elements are pushing at this moment before the Muslim officials—the *hodjas* and the *kadis*—with the slogan ‘Gather all Muslims for the forthcoming events’. They hope to recruit the Muslim armed formations, particularly the Muslim militia, which has shown a great sympathy for our struggle. Its basic task is to prevent the active defection of those Muslim formations to our People’s Liberation Army. They represent that anti-Chetnik cutting-edge among the sentiments of the Muslim masses, who have on the basis of their own experience determined that the Chetniks are the most actual danger for the survival of the Muslims.<sup>124</sup>

Despite this rivalry, both the Partisans and the Muslim autonomists provided outlets for the general Muslim revolt against the Ustasha regime, which manifested itself in many forms. A Muslim journalist for the pro-regime newspaper the *Sarajevski Novi List* was reported in January 1944 to have publicly cursed the Muslim Ustashes, claiming that ‘the Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina give no support, absolutely none, to Ministers Hakija Hadžić and Džafer Kulenović because they have done nothing in these difficult circumstances for the suffering Muslims; still less have they spoken even a word to them of encouragement’.<sup>125</sup>

The Partisans liberated Bosanska Dubica for the first time on 12–13 October 1943 with the loss of only three soldiers, thanks to the assistance they received from the town’s NOP. Captain Turac, commander of the town garrison, arranged the surrender of the town to the Partisans and disbanded the town militia prior to the Partisan attack. According to NDH reports, the Home Guards simply surrendered Bosanska Dubica without a struggle and the Partisans entered the town on the basis of a ‘full agreement with the officers of the local garrison’ and ‘without a single bullet fired from the side of the Home Guards’. An Ustasha official complained that Turac could easily have repelled the Partisans, had he so wished: ‘He admitted himself at the time that he was so well armed that he was capable of resisting a very strong attack by the rebels.’<sup>126</sup> When the Partisans occupied Bosanska Dubica, they found ‘numerous collaborators’ among the town’s Croat and Muslim population, according to a UNS report.<sup>127</sup>

The increasing unwillingness of the Home Guards to fight the Partisans was everywhere apparent. The morale of the troops of the 13<sup>th</sup> Zagreb Cavalry Regiment, stationed in Central Bosnia, largely collapsed by the summer of 1943. One officer of this Regiment, Aleksandar Volf, the Home Guard commander of the village of Vinci, defected with his twenty men to the Partisans in August; all twenty were Croats from Zagorje, the most conservative and ethnically homogeneous region of Croatia proper. In the days that followed several hundred more Home Guards defected to the Partisans from the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment, leading to its complete collapse. Volf himself was killed fighting as a Partisan a few months later.<sup>128</sup> Such behaviour incited the Ustashes to increasingly severe retribution against the Home Guards. When the Ustasha police suppressed the Communist movement in the town of Prijedor in the autumn of 1943, they arrested a number of Home Guards and forced the entire garrison to witness the execution of their fellow soldiers as a warning to them not to collaborate with the NOP.<sup>129</sup> Yet this merely encouraged further Home Guard defections to the Partisans. The Ustasha authorities were aware of pro-Partisan feelings among the Home Guards right



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across the NDH by the autumn of 1943.<sup>130</sup> Nor was Prijedor pacified by this act of Ustasha brutality, and in mid November a delegation of Muslims from Prijedor visited the NDH government in Zagreb to lobby for the release of ninety of their compatriots arrested for collaboration with the Partisans.<sup>131</sup>

Muslim alienation from the Ustashes and the Axis was greatest in Hercegovina and south-west Bosnia, where the Muslim population had been least protected from the Chetnik onslaught. In Mostar, the 'greater part of the intelligentsia is Anglophile in orientation', reported the UNS in late August 1943.<sup>132</sup> The Command of the Gendarmerie Platoon for Gacko reported on 30 September 1943:

Recently an ever greater discontent is apparent among the Islamic population. The reasons for this are unknown, but some are openly declaring themselves to be Partisan supporters and are saying that they will no longer fight or fire a single gun if the Partisans should happen to come, for they are happily awaiting the arrival of the latter, if only to expel the Chetniks from the locality.<sup>133</sup>

In the Čapljina region, it was felt among the Muslim population that 'all representatives of the Ustasha government were hostile to the Muslims, therefore almost none of the Muslims participates in the Ustasha movement'.<sup>134</sup> Chetnik atrocities in the Čapljina region 'have provoked a great revolt among the Muslim population, particularly since the Germans continue to collaborate with the Chetniks'.<sup>135</sup> 'In the Stolac district', the UNS reported on 1 November, 'dissatisfaction towards the Independent State of Croatia reigns among the Muslim population'.<sup>136</sup>

In Hutovo in Hercegovina on 14 September 1943 the Home Guard commander Major Taboršak surrendered his entire unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, to the Partisans on the basis of an agreement with them, after first arresting all the local Ustashes. A large proportion of these Home Guards then joined the Partisan 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade.<sup>137</sup> In October, the Home Guard commander of the town of Ljubija in north-east Bosnia, Lieutenant-Colonel Širola, surrendered the town to the Partisans, who rewarded him by making him an officer of their own.<sup>138</sup> On 5 November Home Guard officers in Bosanska Krupa in the north-west turned over sixty of their troops to the Partisans in a deliberate act of betrayal.<sup>139</sup> Even Croat soldiers serving in units of the 370<sup>th</sup> German Division stationed in Bosnia-Hercegovina sympathised with the Partisans and, on occasion, defected to them.<sup>140</sup> In February 1944 incidents of Home Guards physically attacking German soldiers were reported from the Mostar region.<sup>141</sup>

In consequence of this change in Muslim attitude, the occupiers and Ustashes increasingly turned their repression, previously concentrated against the Serb population, on other Bosnians, and this repression became increasingly indiscriminate. In mid June 1943 the Ustashes recaptured Srebrenica from the Partisans and massacred about 200 inhabitants of the town and the surrounding area, mostly Muslims, including the president of the district court and his wife and three small children, as well as the director of the post office. These individuals, apparently, were personally killed by the Ustasha lieutenant who led the massacre, who was then promoted to captain.<sup>142</sup> The UNS reported that 'the [Ustasha] court carried out an investigation and found that that young, ideal and competent officer Kurelac was not in any way guilty'.<sup>143</sup> During July 1943, German forces carried



out a series of reprisals against Muslim civilians for Partisan actions. On 8 July, German troops rounded up and executed thirty-one Muslim civilians from the villages of Prisoje and Podkozari near Čajniče, including several children. On 12 July soldiers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Prince Eugene SS Division slaughtered sixty-nine Muslims from the village of Košutice near Sokolac.<sup>144</sup> On the same day, soldiers of the same division burned the Muslim village of Orašje near Mostar and massacred sixty-four of its inhabitants, including twenty-five children under fifteen years of age.<sup>145</sup> According to a report from the 5<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment, German troops attacked the villages of Hotičina and Stajna near Pale on 22 October 1943. They rounded up both the Serb and the Muslim inhabitants, killing all who attempted to escape, before setting the villages on fire. The villagers were deported to Sarajevo and Pale; on the road to Pale those incapable of withstanding the journey were slaughtered on the spot.<sup>146</sup> In January 1944 German troops in the course of anti-Partisan operations executed twenty Muslim civilians from the villages of Vladavići and Lukavac Gornji in the Tuzla district, and burned down part of the Muslim village of Podhum in the Konjic district after confiscating the villagers' livestock. In both instances the Muslim communities attacked had no links with the Partisans, according to Ustasha sources.<sup>147</sup> Such German actions merely accelerated Muslim entry into the Partisans. Conversely, German efforts to reign in the wilder elements on their side also lost them support. The Germans responded to the Ustasha massacre of Muslims at Srebrenica by arresting twenty-five Ustashas. The German action created 'an extreme dissatisfaction among many Croats' who began to 'lose faith in the independence of Croatia, when it is not known how much power is held by Croatia and how much by the Gestapo'.<sup>148</sup>

## *The first liberation of Tuzla*

The first Partisan liberation of Tuzla in October 1943 marked the point at which the Bosnian Partisans ceased to be what was essentially a Serb mass movement with a multinational leadership and became a genuinely multinational movement at the mass level. In the Tuzla region the Partisans came closest to the ideal of a resistance movement in which all nationalities participated equally and in October 1943 there was a genuinely revolutionary explosion among Muslims, Croats and Serbs on a cross-national basis. Nevertheless, the readiness of the Tuzla HSS organisation and part of the Croat population to go over to the NOP was replicated in few other towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The real significance of the first liberation of Tuzla was that it marked the point at which the mass entry of Muslims into the Partisans definitely took off.

Tuzla, with its mining suburb of Kreka, was an old industrial centre where the development of salt and coal mining had begun in the first years of the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Tuzla was in the inter-war period the largest mining centre of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the site of the legendary Husino Uprising of Communist miners in 1920. This uprising and the repression that followed nevertheless caused a reaction among part of the Tuzla labour movement against Communist extremism, so that in Tuzla thereafter a strong reformist or Social Democratic current was present in trade union politics.<sup>149</sup> Although during the 1930s the KPJ gradually gained a dominant influence in the Unified Workers' Syndicate Union

organisation, Tuzla remained an area of considerable political pluralism within working class ranks. In the 1930s the dissident Tuzla Communists—allegedly ‘Trotskyists’—Slobodan Milošević and Mašo Altumbabić were a thorn in the side of the official KPJ.

Tuzla was and remains to this day the Bosnian town with the strongest degree of multinational co-existence. At the popular level this was due to the proletarian character of the region, with class-consciousness within the labour movement overriding national divisions. Higher up the social ladder, Tuzla’s Muslim, Croat and Serb elites enjoyed generally more harmonious relations than elsewhere in the country. The city before the war possessed also a prosperous and influential Jewish community. The Tuzla Muslims played a central role in the formation of the JMO in 1919 and the party’s first leader, Hafiz Ibrahim efendi Maglajlić, was the Tuzla mufti. On account of the gravitational pull of nearby Serbia, the pro-Serb current among the Tuzla Muslims was nevertheless strong. In 1923 several of the most prominent of the latter left the JMO in opposition to Spaho’s turn towards the federalist opposition to the Yugoslav regime; they included the Tuzla Mayor Osman Vilović, the Tuzla *oblast* superintendent Ahmedbeg Defterdarević, and Maglajlić himself, who became leader of the pro-Belgrade ‘Yugoslav Muslim National Organisation’. Representative of this pro-Serb Muslim current was Professor Meša Selimović, a Partisan commander during the war and subsequently the great novelist, who was an ethnic Muslim but identified as a Serb. Selimović, his brothers Šefkija and Muhamed and his sister Fadila were all arrested as NOP activists in the autumn of 1942; his brother Fadil was already with the Partisans.<sup>150</sup>

The large and militant Croat working class population, for its part, imparted a leftist character to the Tuzla HSS organisation, which went over to the NOP in October 1943. The Croat-oriented Muslim cultural organisation Narodna Uzdanica, whose branches across Bosnia-Herzegovina had welcomed the establishment of the NDH in 1941, was in Tuzla a hive of Communist activity. The SKOJ organisation in Narodna Uzdanica collected money and goods for the Partisans and their families. By the autumn of 1943 twenty-three students of the higher classes of the gymnasium and the teacher-training college, who had resided in the Narodna Uzdanica boarding school, had joined the Partisans; nine were killed during the war.<sup>151</sup> Under the impact of the excesses following the suppression of the Husino Uprising, Tuzla was the first Yugoslav town in which the authorities closed down the local ‘Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists’ paramilitary organisation in 1923, to prevent its disturbance of the peace.

Following the establishment of King Aleksandar’s dictatorship in 1929, most prominent Muslims supported the regime. Among these was the land- and mine-owner Muratbeg Zaimović, who joined the Yugoslav National Party and served as president of the municipality and president of the Tuzla organisation of Gajret, the Serb-oriented Muslim cultural society. Others were Avdo Hasanbegović, Lutvo Sijerčić, Osman Vilović and Abdulah Kunošić. The JMO at this time possessed no authoritative personality among the Tuzla elite, but after the establishment of the regime of the Yugoslav Radical Union under Milan Stojadinović in Belgrade in 1935, which based itself in Bosnia upon the JMO, the latter was able to become the largest party in the district. The pro-Serb course among the Mus-

lims was discredited by the Cvetković-Maček Sporazum and members of the Tuzla Muslim elite such as Zaimović, Hasanbegović and Vilović, who had previously collaborated with King Aleksandar's dictatorship, now campaigned behind Džaferbeg Kulenović in 1939–41 for Bosnian autonomy. Nevertheless, members of this faction remained disinclined to follow the pro-Croat course and were not natural Ustasha collaborators. Hasanaga Pašić, leader of the JMO Tuzla organisation and president of the Tuzla municipality at the time of the Axis invasion, refused to collaborate with the NDH.<sup>152</sup>

JMO and Gajret members in Tuzla were from the first months of the occupation inclined towards the Partisans or even the Chetniks in preference to the NDH. But even those who did collaborate tended to reject the Ustashes' genocidal policies and under Mayor Seadbeg Kulović (before 1941 a member of the pro-Croat Muslim Branch of the HSS) and Great Župan Ragib Čaplijić the Tuzla Serbs were safer than elsewhere in the country.<sup>153</sup> In late 1942 the German Commander in Croatia, Lieutenant General Rudolf Lütters, reported that 'the Muslim population of the Tuzla region is in every respect unreliable. They collaborate both with the Croats and with the Serbs and Partisans, trying to play one off against the other.'<sup>154</sup> The UNS reported in May 1943 that 'in Tuzla there is a considerable number of Serb Muslims who conspire with the Serbs, particularly in recent times since the German and Italian forces have withdrawn from Tunisia'.<sup>155</sup> When, shortly following the establishment of the NDH, about ten Serbs from Rogatica disappeared, Čaplijić visited the town in person and attempted to launch an investigation. The Ustasha Chief for the Great Župa of Usora and Soli reported in July 1941: 'Mr Čaplijić in Rogatica tried everything to obtain the release of the Serbs—Chetniks and Communists—who had been arrested there, of whom there are several tens, even though the Ustasha authorities that arrested them possess serious evidence against them, for example for possession of weapons, Communist pamphlets, Great Serb propaganda and so forth'. Čaplijić furthermore 'met in Rogatica with various Serbs and other uncertain elements and reassured them, that he would restore order in that region and that he would no longer on any account tolerate the committing of various "crimes" by the Ustashes, who supposedly had no authority to exercise any kind of government, let alone the "terror" that they had been engaged in up to now'.<sup>156</sup> As the Serb rising spread in response to Ustasha atrocities, Čaplijić went so far as to urge the Muslims of East Bosnia to join the Partisans' Muslim Battalion.<sup>157</sup>

Even Jews fared better in Tuzla than elsewhere and in the autumn of 1941 the region became a haven for Croatian Jewish doctors fleeing annihilation in Zagreb and other towns in Croatia proper. They came with the acquiescence of the Ustasha regime, whose anti-Semitism was more opportunistic than that of the Nazis and which wished to improve its prestige among the Muslim population by tackling disease in the region more effectively than had the previous regime. Sixteen Jewish doctors settled in Tuzla, where they survived with the help of the citizens and in particular of Dr Luka Šimović, director of the Office of Public Health. The majority of these Jewish doctors subsequently joined the Partisans, particularly following the liberation of the city two years later.<sup>158</sup> The Tuzla Muslim elite and masses, alienated from both the Ustasha and Chetnik movements and with an outlook different from that of the mainstream Muslim elite represented

by Uzeiraga Hadžihasanović, were from 1941 looking for a way out of their isolation and suffering and it was the Tuzla Muslims who spearheaded the establishment of the Domdo formations.

In order to lay the foundations of a resistance movement, the Tuzla Oblast Committee of the KPJ held a meeting on 25 May, attended by Iso Jovanović, secretary of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Hercegovina. The meeting established an Oblast Military Leadership which was charged in turn with forming District Military Leaderships for the surrounding countryside. Ustasha rule in Tuzla prior to Operation Barbarossa was relatively passive and leading KPJ activists travelled back and forth between the city and Sarajevo in this period without suffering harm. The struggle between the supporters of the NDH and the NOP began in earnest in Tuzla after 22 June when the Ustasas began to systematically arrest Communists. During the second half of July Uglješa Danilović arrived bearing the Provincial Committee's order for the uprising to begin and convened a meeting of the Oblast Committee to set it in motion. An Oblast Staff was formed with the Croat Ivan Marković-Irac as commander, the Serb Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo as deputy commander and the Muslim Pašaga Mandžić as political commissar. This was followed by District Military Staffs for Birač, Majevisa-Semberija and Ozren. The Oblast Staff thereupon moved to Birač, the East Bosnian region whose rebels subsequently proved most resistant to Chetnik agitation. As in other parts of the country the focus of Communist activity thereupon shifted to the peasant rebellion and Tuzla was left with only a small Communist presence.<sup>159</sup>

Tuzla's citizens continued, however, to show exceptional solidarity in the face of Ustasha crimes. On 26 August 1941 the Ustasas arrested forty citizens of the town to hold as hostages for probable execution. In response the Tuzla Local Committee of the KPJ organised via its sympathisers a conference of leading citizens on the premises of the 'Senaat' Society. Dr Mustafa Mujbegović distinguished himself on this occasion in his denunciation of Ustasha crimes. Following the conference three prominent citizens headed by Tuzla's Mufti Muhamed Šefket efendi Kurt visited the German commander Hochbajer and Colonel Visa and complained to them of the Ustasas' intentions. The German commanders responded by prohibiting the Ustasas from retaliating against the prisoners without their permission. At the same time, on the initiative of the Local Committee, prominent Croat citizens including Jure Begić and Ante Kamenjašević took similar action. Four of the prisoners were executed on 5 September, the rest were sentenced to prison terms.<sup>160</sup> The Ustasas in Tuzla sentenced eleven KPJ and SKOJ members to death on 4 February 1942, but the unpopularity of this action led them to reduce the sentences of seven of them to prison terms.<sup>161</sup> Ustasha repression in a town whose population was in political terms overwhelmingly alien territory increased the latter's receptiveness to liberation by the Partisans. By the autumn of 1941 the NOP had built a web of sympathisers in Tuzla which collected money, clothes, weapons, medicine and other supplies on behalf of the Partisans.<sup>162</sup>

In Tuzla, as in other old industrial centres such as Zenica and Vareš, the proletariat as a whole could not be mobilised for a mass uprising in the summer of 1941; the Tuzla workers and Communists were not natural guerrilla fighters. On 12 October Mahmut Bušatlija-Buš, formerly a leading student activist at Belgrade

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University, led a group of KPJ and SKOJ members out of Tuzla to join the Partisans on Majeвица. The band lost its way in the forest and on 16 October was surprised by the gendarmes from Gornja Tuzla who had been informed by a local peasant of the presence of the Communists. Bušatlija hurled a grenade at the gendarmes but it rebounded off a branch and blew up in his face, mortally wounding him. The other Communists fled but all except one were captured. Further arrests were then made of Communists in the town, greatly weakening its KPJ and SKOJ organisations.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, many Tuzla workers, on an individual basis, were ready to fight in the Partisans. The infiltration of the Husino Ustasha organisation, described above, was a notable success, and hundreds of workers and citizens of Tuzla volunteered for the Partisans from 1941; thousands more would be readily mobilised following the first and second liberations of Tuzla in 1943 and 1944.

The Ustashes in Tuzla planned to celebrate the eve of Orthodox Christmas, 6 January 1942, by blowing up an Orthodox church filled with worshippers; intended as a prelude to a general massacre of Tuzla's Serbs. Once again, a delegation of prominent Muslims led by Mufti Kurt, himself the father of two Communists, visited the German military authority and successfully demanded that this plan be halted. Kurt thereupon led a delegation to Zagreb and requested from the Poglavnik in person an end to the persecution of Tuzla's Serbs.<sup>164</sup> Kurt also responded to the planned Ustasha assault on the Tuzla Serbs by declaring at a session of the Great Župa: 'The Ottoman Empire itself issued *firman*s for the building of Serb churches, and this is shameful, that brothers in Christ destroy each other's churches.'<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, in February the Ustashes proceeded to execute several NOP supporters and deport others to Jasenovac. The brutality of the Ustasha regime ensured that the Tuzla KPJ was able to find willing recruits to replace Party members who were periodically arrested. At the same time arrested Communists were periodically freed from prison under pressure from the town notables and citizenry. These included Meša Selimović.<sup>166</sup>

In the spring of 1942 Mustafa Vilović, who had joined the Party the previous autumn, became Secretary of the Local Committee of the Tuzla KPJ. Vilović's father Osman was the former Mayor of Tuzla and an opponent of the Ustasha regime. As Local Committee Secretary, Vilović nurtured relations with leading Tuzla Croats and Muslims including Jure Begić, Ante Kamenjašević, Mufti Kurt, Muratbeg Zaimović, Hamdija Čemerlić and others.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, Vilović and KPJ instructor Vladimir Perić-Valter developed ties with leading members of the NDH army and security apparatus. Gustav Bombek, an officer of the 8<sup>th</sup> Home Guard Regiment, was recruited as an NOP agent. Vilović and Perić-Valter established contact with two other Home Guard officers, Ekber Muftić and Sulejman Filipović. The latter, a colonel, had been in contact with Vukmanović-Tempo in Sarajevo when stationed there in 1941. In this way, the Communists' intelligence reached into all branches of the NDH military and police and even into the Gestapo. The Tuzla Communists gathered important information on the numbers, armaments, positions and morale of enemy soldiers in the city, including a detailed plan of the town's defences that was sent to the staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps immediately prior to its attack on Tuzla in the autumn of 1943, giving the Partisans an inestimable advantage in the battle.<sup>168</sup>

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The UNS described Tuzla in July 1942 as 'the crossroads of enemy activity for the whole of East Bosnia...'<sup>169</sup> During 1943 the agents of the UNS reported increasing activity among the Tuzla Muslims that was hostile to the Ustasha regime, motivated by various combinations of Muslim-autonomist, pro-Serb and pro-Communist sympathies.<sup>170</sup> In May, Major Hadžiefendić gave a speech of farewell to Muslim officers recruited into the SS, according to an Ustasha source, 'in which he did not say a single word about the Croatian state, mentioning only the places where Muslims lived, as if they did not fight for Croatia, but only for their own homes. As if the Croatian state was a porch placed in nowhere.' The same source noted: 'There are many Muslim Serbs in Tuzla, who have been whispering with Serbs, especially in recent times, since the German and Italian forces withdrew from Tunisia.'<sup>171</sup> The Ustasha massacre of Muslim civilians in Srebrenica in June provoked outrage among the Tuzla Muslims, prompting several of them to resign from the Ustasha movement; the UNS reported that 'Many malevolently criticise and prepare the populace for a religious war against the Croats. An Islamic stirring has been noticed among the majority of Muslims, but all solely on a religious basis.'<sup>172</sup> Among those particularly suspected by the Ustasas of treasonous activities at this time was the mine-owner Muratbeg Zaimović. The Ustasas believed that he employed Jews and Serbs and maintained links with the Chetniks.<sup>173</sup>

In the nearby mining town of Živinice, where Zaimović owned mines and his influence was strong, the UNS reported at the start of July that 'there had been good Croats, but now there are fewer every day, for our enemies spread anti-Croat propaganda, in regard to which nobody is paying attention and nobody is preventing them'.<sup>174</sup> The UNS viewed the Muslims of Živinice as hostile to the regime and as 'Serb oriented'.<sup>175</sup> The Partisan capture of the town of Kladanj to the south of Tuzla at the end of June created panic among some sections of the Tuzla population and rejoicing among others; Ustasha officials began preparations to abandon the city, while pro-Communist youth began to come out onto the streets in larger numbers.<sup>176</sup> The failure of the Ustasha authorities to respond in force to the increasing activity of the NOP in Tuzla further discredited them in the eyes of the Muslim population, which increasingly assumed the Ustasas' days were numbered.<sup>177</sup>

Tuzla was a world apart in some ways from the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina and just as the town proved to be an exemplar of multinational resistance to the occupiers and the NDH, so its resistance acted on occasion at variance with the plans of the Bosnian and Yugoslav NOP leaderships. The roots of this can be traced to the summer of 1942 when Muhamed Sadiković-Škrab, KPJ instructor at the Tuzla Local Committee, allegedly resisted the dispatch of Tuzla Communists to the newly formed 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade because he was unwilling to deplete the town's Communist organisation that was painfully recovering from repeated Ustasha arrests and executions.<sup>178</sup> In January 1943, with the acquiescence of higher Party authorities, Vilović made contact with Stjepan Vujić, head of the UNS in Tuzla. This connection was to pay major dividends for the NOP, as Vujić protected Vilović and other NOP agents from persecution and arrest.<sup>179</sup>

The weakness and unpopularity of the Ustasha regime in the Tuzla region made it a natural focus of Communist attention. As early as the autumn of 1942

Avdo Humo had recommended to Tito an orientation towards north-east Bosnia because 'it would be possible further to mobilise new forces, particularly the workers of the Tuzla basin and the Muslims, who are ready immediately to join the Partisans'.<sup>180</sup> Yet the Bosnian Communist leadership was aware that the question of whether the Muslim population would declare for the Partisans en masse hinged upon the attitude of the Muslim notables. The Communists would have to deal with the latter if they were to win the Muslim population for the NOP. The Bosnian Communists thus held negotiations in early August at Šekovići with an envoy of Colonel Sulejman Filipović over a possible alliance between the Partisans and Filipović's Muslim circle. As Čolaković reported, Filipović, through his envoy, informed the Communists that on the basis of his prior discussions with them he had 'endeavoured to deepen and expand his connections, for the fact is that this is no longer a local affair but is much wider (provincial). He declared that they are now in a position to give expression to the opinions of their organisation in the whole of Bosnia-Hercegovina.' He now sought that 'at the chosen moment all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes who bear arms should cease spilling fraternal blood and begin to fight together as a single force'. He hoped thereby to include the Chetniks in the resistance along with the Partisans, presumably to avoid cutting his ties with the Yugoslav government-in-exile. Filipović favoured swift action to eliminate the Italian forces: 'This would be the first moment for Bosnia-Hercegovina'; it was necessary 'rapidly to liberate the province, for which they [i.e. the Muslim dissidents] would employ their forces in unison with ours and then establish a front on the Sava and the Drina, so as to achieve a major stronghold, a spring-board for further advances'. After thus liberating Bosnia-Hercegovina and turning it into a base for the liberation of the rest of Yugoslavia, Filipović advocated 'the formation of a provisional government' to include 'Ročko [Čolaković], [Muslim militia leader Omer] Gluhić and one other from West Bosnia, a Croat if possible; two to three members from the ranks of the liberal Croats as well as from the ranks of the Muslims'.<sup>181</sup>

The Communists, for their part, insisted that the Muslim forces controlled by Filipović's circle of dissidents must be incorporated wholly within the Partisan military framework. The Communists were ready to allow these forces to be organised as Muslim Partisan units, but not to permit them any autonomous or distinct organisation. Filipović, by contrast, wanted his Home Guards to remain an autonomous force under his personal command, in alliance with the Partisans. However, the greatest bone of contention was the question of the Chetniks; Filipović requested that 'an honourable Chetnik (such as he is) be recruited into the provisional government' on the grounds that 'that way the Serbs would be more satisfied'. Čolaković claimed to have responded that this was unacceptable; that 'the term 'Chetnik' excludes the term 'honourable''. Nevertheless, the Partisans would soon afterwards recruit the East Bosnian Chetnik *vojvoda* Pero Đukanović and accord him a prominent figurehead role in their regime, just as they did Filipović. So far as the formation of the provisional government was concerned, Čolaković considered that the formation of an 'Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Hercegovina' would suffice. Čolaković suggested to the Central Committee that, as the upshot of these negotiations, 'the officer in question [Filipović] be brought into the Supreme Staff because he is not only an



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excellent soldier but is a very popular figure in Bosnia-Herzegovina with many connections'. Čolaković suggested that if this were accomplished, Filipović could then make 'a proclamation to the Muslims via Radio Yugoslavia' in order to encourage Muslim support for the Partisans.<sup>182</sup> Despite the candidness of these negotiations, Filipović was not yet ready to throw in his lot with the Partisans and Čolaković informed the Central Committee on 18 August 1943 that it was the illegal networks of dissident Muslims that were hindering the mass entry of Muslims into the Partisans; these Muslims were aware that the Axis was losing the war but were not yet ready to commit themselves on account of their uncertainty as to the outcome of the Yugoslav civil war.<sup>183</sup> Filipović continued to hedge his bets, also holding talks with Mihailović's Chetniks.<sup>184</sup> He would receive the decisive push with the events of that autumn.

Muslim readiness to serve in the ranks of the quisling armed forces largely collapsed during the second half of 1943. The Tuzla Home Guard garrison was by the autumn of 1943 depleted in numbers and suffering from poor morale; its troops were underarmed and poorly clothed and fed. Over two hundred Home Guards deserted from this garrison during the first half of September.<sup>185</sup> The Tuzla Muslims were unwilling to mobilise in the Handschar Division. The Interior Ministry of the NDH received a report from Tuzla on 21 August 1943 that an SS officer had arrived in Sarajevo the day before and requested NDH assistance in recruitment for the SS forces. The SS officer reported that in Sarajevo:

altogether six men have enlisted, something that has caused the greatest consternation among the Germans. According to the information that we currently have at our disposal, all the Muslims in Tuzla except the women are organising themselves so that not one of them joins the SS troops. They say that if they are forced to join, they will all without exception join the Partisans in the forest. This fleeing to the Partisans has already begun to occur and the legionnaires are already joining the Partisans when the moment is favourable.<sup>186</sup>

The capitulation of Italy, the German turn towards the Chetniks and the threat of East Bosnia's annexation to Nedić's Serbia proved to be decisive in turning the Tuzla Muslims towards the Partisans. An agent of the UNS reported in early September that in Tuzla 'the government has lost its authority' while 'the Germans, on account of their approaches to the Chetniks, are losing the confidence of the Croats'.<sup>187</sup> The agent noted bitterly:

It is shameful that the Germans are protecting the Serbs from the Croats; indeed, are protecting the Chetniks who are the enemies of our independence. It is no wonder that confidence in Croatia is collapsing when our allies in Tuzla do whatever they want, as if the Croatian government did not exist, but only an ordinary occupied German territory.<sup>188</sup>

In mid September German officers were reported to be frequently entering Tuzla on their own initiative in the company of local Chetniks; 'This behaviour of the German officers is negatively influencing the morale of our population...'<sup>189</sup> Rumours spread throughout Tuzla that Hitler had promised Nedić to cede Bosnia to Serbia, to the warm approval of Tuzla's Serb community.<sup>190</sup>

In the same period the UNS reported: 'Recently there is noticeable an ever greater anti-state activity on the part of many Muslims—in part the most promi-

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nent.' Enrolment in the Home Guard had collapsed, with many young Muslims fleeing the town to join the Partisans. The authorities' efforts to recruit soldiers for the Handschar Division from the ranks of the Domdo legion had accelerated the collapse of the latter; 'It is known that the Domdo legion in recent times has completely failed to resist the attacks of the Partisans and has simply fled before them; by this time half of it has gone over to them and joined their ranks.' The authority of the regime had collapsed completely and it was the Partisans and their Muslim collaborators from the ranks of the legion that enjoyed the popularity of the Muslims of Tuzla.<sup>191</sup> Indeed 'the population around Tuzla, particularly the Muslims, increasingly sympathises with the Partisans and says that they do not kill anybody', in the words of another UNS report. However, the same source makes clear that it was not only the Partisans who were the beneficiaries of anti-Ustasha feeling among the Tuzla Muslims, some of whom also organised on a Muslim separatist basis: 'Some groups of Muslims already have green flags with the star and crescent moon.'<sup>192</sup> Nevertheless, on the night of 14–15 September, a part of the legion based in Lukavac, to the west of Tuzla, defected to the Partisans. The following night, in the region of Vukovija to the south-east of Tuzla, the legionnaires of the legion's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion reached an agreement with the Partisans and abandoned the struggle against them.<sup>193</sup>

The Staff of the Partisans' 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps ordered the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian and 17<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Divisions on 27 September 1943 to prepare an attack on Tuzla. The capture of the town would, it suggested:

open broadly the possibility of the mobilisation of manpower and particularly the workers, who are eagerly and impatiently awaiting our army; create the possibility of including the Muslim legion and the Muslims generally within the ranks of the P[eo]ple's L[iberation] A[rmy]; deepen the already apparent differentiation in the ranks of the demoralised Chetniks and enable the successful execution of action against them; open the possibility of the successful military-political action of our forces in the whole of East Bosnia and the strengthening of the position of the People's Liberation Movement.<sup>194</sup>

Thus the liberation of Tuzla was intended to accelerate the influx of the Muslim militia into the NOP, to split the Chetniks and recruit one part of them, to mobilise more recruits for the Partisans and to raise the prestige of the Partisans in East Bosnia.<sup>195</sup>

The operation against Tuzla began on 29 September, during Bajram. As Miloš Zekić, commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade, recalled:

that was the first time in East Bosnia that we attacked a more populous locality, extremely well entrenched and defended by strong forces. For the first time, our companies and battalions had to engage in street fighting in a larger town, to seize fortified buildings, and our staffs to direct the struggle in such complex conditions, maintaining communications with the units, without radio-transmitters and other technical means of contact.<sup>196</sup>

Partisan historians claim that 4,000 enemy soldiers, mostly Home Guards and Ustasas with some Germans, were present in Tuzla while another 2,000 were present in the surrounding strongholds of Gornja Tuzla, Simin Han, Bukinje, Živinice and Lukavac. This is probably an exaggeration and the real NDH troop level may have been as little as a tenth of this. The Partisan forces deployed against

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them were the units of the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division: the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian, 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina and 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigades and the Ozren Detachment; in total about 1,800 fighters. In the wider region, the besieging force was supported by the 15<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigade, the Trebava and Majevisa Detachments and the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division with a total of about 4,900 fighters.<sup>197</sup> The battle for Tuzla lasted from 29 September until 2 October.

The Staff of the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division was for the purposes of the liberation of Tuzla expanded into an 'Operational Staff for the Tuzla Region'. On 30 September 1943 Gligo Mandić, Commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division, issued an ultimatum to the Home Guards of Tuzla demanding their surrender. Mandić claimed: 'We have been precisely informed that the Tuzla garrison is made up in the majority of Croatian officers, NCOs and Home Guards, who cannot and must not be enemies of the People's Liberation Army which is fighting for the freedom of the Croatian and other nations of Yugoslavia.' In the event that they surrendered peacefully, 'we guarantee all officers, NCOs and Home Guards of the Croatian Army, as well as all soldiers and officers of the Muslim militia (legion) complete security of person and property'. However, if the Partisan ultimatum was rejected, 'we shall give the order to our units to destroy ruthlessly anybody who offers resistance and to begin with the destruction and burning both of military assets and of the entire town'. In this event, 'our position towards the Home Guard army and the legion will no longer apply; rather, anyone who up till then has not surrendered their weapons will be deemed an occupier and will be treated most mercilessly'. Mandić warned the Home Guards to 'reply as promptly as possible to this ultimatum via the same courier, for that is in the interest both of yourselves and of the population of Tuzla'.<sup>198</sup>

The first Partisan assault on Tuzla was, after fierce fighting, beaten back with heavy losses by the superior Home Guard artillery. The Partisans nevertheless surrounded the town and cut off all means of retreat from it.<sup>199</sup> On 1 October, the staff of the Tuzla Domdo regiment sent a letter to the Partisans, assuring them that 'Losses on both sides are completely unnecessary' and that 'we are all for you'. The Domdo forces were 'agreed upon enabling the taking of Tuzla without greater losses' and 'would have done so earlier, but we are in a difficult situation and were not informed in time'. The Domdo staff requested a meeting of commanders to negotiate the surrender of Tuzla to the Partisans.<sup>200</sup> Mandić replied that 'it is true that losses are pointless, but only from your side, for the losses suffered by the fighters of our units lead to the liberation of our peoples from the yoke of the Fascist-Kraut occupiers'. He vowed that 'all resistance will be mercilessly crushed regardless of from whom it came'. He repeated the call to surrender and demanded the arrest of all Germans in the town.<sup>201</sup>

The Domdo legion at Molute, at the centre of the Kreka industrial basin, had as its commander Muhamed Gagić, a professor of the Tuzla gymnasium and NOP sympathiser. The legion was tolerant of NOP activities and offered no resistance to the Partisans during the battle. On 1 October it surrendered peacefully to the 17<sup>th</sup> Division. The Molute legion, under Gagić's command, then became a battalion within the Tuzla Partisan Detachment formed three weeks later. Members of the legion provided the Partisan units with local military information and acted as guides during the assault on Tuzla. Another NOP activist in the Molute

legion was Salko Mešković, who arranged the surrender of his unit to the 17<sup>th</sup> Division and was subsequently made Partisan Commander of the Local Command for Kreka.<sup>202</sup>

The decisive assault on Tuzla began on the night of 1–2 October. The outcome was decided when seventy-seven Home Guard officers under Filipović, Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Home Guard Regiment and consequently the senior NDH commander in the region, took the decision to surrender, after which the Home Guard rank and file abandoned its weapons and positions *en masse*.<sup>203</sup> On 2 October the 17<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Division (the 1<sup>st</sup> Majevisa, 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Muslim Brigades) assisted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Brigade and the Majevisa, Ozren and Trebava Detachments captured the towns of Tuzla, Lukavac and Živinice. On 3 October the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division liberated Gornja Tuzla. Seventy-seven Home Guard officers headed by three lieutenant-colonels and one colonel went over to the side of the Partisans during the liberation of Tuzla. The Partisans claimed to have captured over 2,000 enemy soldiers and officers, including a Home Guard general, and to have killed at least five hundred.<sup>204</sup> The Partisans were assisted by diversionary activities organised by the Tuzla KPJ organisation from within the town.<sup>205</sup> During the battle for Tuzla, a hundred local miners joined the Partisan ranks.<sup>206</sup>

Tuzla following its liberation became the base of the Bosnian Partisan movement. The Provincial Committee, Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps and Oblast Committee for East Bosnia all relocated there. On the evening of 3 October the Partisans convened a mass rally in the centre of Tuzla to propagate their political goals. This coincided with the arrival of a German counteroffensive force in the suburbs of the town at Bukinje. The Partisan rally therefore took on unexpectedly the form of a call-up for the defence of the town, in which Pašaga Mandžić, himself a veteran Tuzla proletarian activist, called upon the miners to defend their town. The miners and other citizens received weapons and along with the Partisans of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade assumed positions in the trenches around the town that had only the day before been defended by the enemy. Three hundred new recruits joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade that night alone. On this occasion, the Partisans made an exception to their rule of avoiding defensive fighting. Instead of abandoning the town in the face of the counterattack as was their usual tactic, they took the decision to defend it at all costs. The morale of the Partisans was greatly increased by the mass participation of the miners and other citizens in the defence. In a battle lasting two days and three nights, the Partisans and citizens of Tuzla successfully beat off the German assault. On the night of 5–6 October, the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps ordered a counteroffensive. The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Divisions repelled the Germans, forcing them back towards Doboj. The victory earned Tuzla forty days of freedom from the occupiers and the NDH.<sup>207</sup>

On the day following the liberation of the town, the Partisans established a City NOO of twenty-five members of all nationalities—Muslims, Serbs, Croats and Jews. These included at least two lawyers, three judges, a professor, the headmaster of the Citizens' School and a bank official. The City NOO engaged itself in the supply of food to the citizens, the administration of public utilities and the opening of shops and businesses. At the end of October a 'people's loan' of 32 million kuna was floated, to which the wealthier citizens subscribed. Among the promi-

nent Tuzla Muslims who went over to the Partisans at this time were Mufti Kurt, Muratbeg Zaimović and the law professor Hamdija Čemerlić. They assisted the Partisans through political agitation and in encouraging the mobilisation of fighters.<sup>208</sup> The Župa Police Oblast in Sarajevo reported on 8 October 1943 that 'the population of Tuzla is cooperating with the Partisans'.<sup>209</sup>

The printing press of the new Partisan newspaper *Oslobođenje*, launched by a decision of the Provincial Committee in August, was moved from Majevica to liberated Tuzla where its third issue was printed.<sup>210</sup> The paper represented formally the People's Liberation Front of Bosnia-Herzegovina and would be the outlet for fiery Bosnian-patriotic articles by the most eloquent voices in the movement, including the poets Branko Ćopić and Skender Kulenović. Following *Oslobođenje's* eventual transfer to the Partisan bastion of Bosanska Krajina, a new paper, *Front Slobode* ('Front of Freedom'), would appear as the official mouthpiece of the East Bosnian People's Liberation Front.

The entire leadership of the Tuzla HSS organisation went over to the Partisans following the liberation of Tuzla. These included Jure Begić, Ante Kamenjašević, Ivo Sunarić, Bogomir Brajković, Luka Šimović and Ivica Martinović. At their head was Aleksandar Preka, half-Croat, half-Albanian and a former member of the NDH assembly. Under his guidance on 3 October the Tuzla Local Organisation of the HSS met at the Croat House in the city and voted to join the NOP and form a Croat Partisan brigade. The HSS leaders met the Communist leaders to discuss collaboration and the following day Preka, Sunarić and Brajković met to arrange an appeal to the Croat population of East Bosnia to join the NOP.<sup>211</sup> This appeal claimed that to do so was to follow in the 'spirit of the teaching of Stjepan Radić, who always had his eyes fixed upon the great Russian nation, expecting from it help for all the other Slavic nations', and that at a time when the Russians are 'smashing the forces of the German occupiers and the red sun is appearing on the Russian steppes', the 'Slavic heart speaks in every Croat person'.<sup>212</sup>

The Tuzla HSS leadership proposed the formation of a Croat Partisan brigade, and HSS members toured Croat localities in the region to mobilise soldiers. The 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade was founded at a ceremony held at Husino in commemoration of the miners' uprising of 1920. Within twelve days the Partisans had recruited six hundred Croats for the new brigade, two hundred of whom were members of the working class of the Tuzla region. The command cadre of the Brigade, other than the political commissars, were former Home Guard officers, though the Brigade commander himself was the veteran Communist Franjo Herljević. The Brigade was intended to provide the means for the mass mobilisation of Croats in the Partisans.<sup>213</sup> However, the Provincial Committee noted on 14 October that 'we shall have a lot of difficulties concerning the cadre for that brigade, since it would be desirable if for now it contained as many Croat leaders as possible'.<sup>214</sup>

The Serb community in Tuzla was prior to the liberation generally pro-Chetnik in orientation, but upon the liberation went over to the Partisans.<sup>215</sup> On 5 October Čolaković, Mijatović-Majo and Todor Vujašinović held a conference with leading Tuzla Serbs, including Simo Eraković of the League of Farmers, Professor Rade Peleš, the lawyer Ljubomir Peleš, the hotelier Pero Stokanović, the Reverend Dimitrije Janković, judge Nikifor Todić and gymnasium headmaster Đorđe Vasković, who agreed to issue a proclamation condemning the Chet-

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niks and calling upon the Serbs of the Tuzla region to join the NOP. The Serb proclamation was published in the same issue of *Oslobođenje* as the HSS's Croat proclamation.<sup>216</sup>

A third proclamation was issued to the 'Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Legionnaires and Militiamen; Muslims, Croats and Serbs!', on behalf of sixty-five Home Guard officers and thirteen NCOs, headed by Colonel Filipović, two other colonels, a lieutenant-colonel and a major. It claimed:

All officers of the Tuzla brigade and Domdo regiment, imbued with great love for our people and consumed with hatred for the occupier, convinced that only the People's Liberation Movement leads to the liberation of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, have long since been assisting the People's Liberation Struggle and been searching for the moment when we could join it.

Consequently: 'We officers of the Tuzla brigade and Domdo regiment in Tuzla, conscious of the tasks of earnest patriots, join the People's Liberation Army, ready to go the way of the People's Liberation Struggle to the final victory over the occupier.' It ended with the slogans 'Long live free Yugoslavia and free and reconciled Bosnia'. 'Death to fascism—freedom to the people!'<sup>217</sup>

Following the liberation of Tuzla previously untapped sources of manpower were mobilised for the Partisans. Within twelve days 1,500 new Partisans had been recruited from the region. In total, five thousand new Partisans were mobilised in the wider Tuzla region following the victories of October 1943. To accommodate these new recruits during October the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps formed in Tuzla the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa, 18<sup>th</sup> Croat and 19<sup>th</sup> Birač Brigades, the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division and the Tuzla Detachment. Across the territory of East Bosnia, in order to secure the Partisan rear, Territorial Commands were established for Gradačac, Modriča, Bosanski Šamac, Tuzla, Kreka, Živinice, Lukavac, Vlasenica, Srebrenica, Han Pijesak and Bijeljina. At the start of November, on the initiative of the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for East Bosnia and the Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina, a conference of the most senior members of the NOP elected an Initial Oblast People's Liberation Council for East Bosnia. This was followed by the formation of provisional Okrug NOOs for Majevisa, Posavina-Trebava, Birač and Tuzla.<sup>218</sup> In total, approximately 3,000 Tuzla Muslims joined the Partisans following the first liberation, an expression of Muslim rejection of Ustasha terror and collaboration with the Chetniks.<sup>219</sup> From a total pre-war population of 16,700, the town of Tuzla allegedly provided 5,037 Partisans by November 1944, while the suburbs contributed a further 2,000. Seven hundred inhabitants of Tuzla were killed as Partisans.<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, the victory at Tuzla was a turning point in terms of the social character of the NOP. Mijatović-Majo recalls: 'The importance of the liberation of Tuzla for us was that much greater, because it was primarily inhabited by workers, which were needed to fill the ranks of the People's Liberation Army—which up till then had been in the majority composed of peasant elements.'<sup>221</sup>

The dark side of this process was the execution of a total of fifty-five individuals. Although the majority of these were NDH officials, including the Domdo commander Major Hadžiefendić, they included others who were simply considered political enemies, such as the alleged Trotskyists Slobodan Milošević and

Mašo Altumbabić, who had for a long time been subject to a great deal of viciousness by Communist propaganda; their executions represented the settling of an old score. The Bosnian historian Adnan Jahić writes of Milošević that 'his unexpected execution was received with indignation and disbelief by his parents and in some Serb circles—for days along the street where he had lived there hung a sense of foreboding along with the wails of his devastated mother'. Meanwhile, Ustasha sources reported that 'on account of the executions, which are still continuing, the sentiments of the population are turning strongly against the Partisans'.<sup>222</sup> The veteran Communist Mladen Čaldarović, himself a free-thinker who fell into disfavour with Tito, records the guilt and shame he and other Communists felt at their failure to protest the execution of Milošević and Altumbabić, unlike at least one non-Communist politician who intervened unsuccessfully with the Partisans to prevent it.<sup>223</sup> According to Ustasha sources, the Partisans also plundered Tuzla's factories, businesses and shops thoroughly during their stay in the town.<sup>224</sup>

The importance of the victory at Tuzla was summed up by the Provincial Committee of Bosnia-Herzegovina in its report to the Central Committee of 14 October 1943: 'the liberation of Tuzla is not only our major military success; it is a major event that has fundamentally changed the political situation in East Bosnia to our advantage... not until the liberation of Tuzla did there begin the mass defection of the Muslims to our position; their adherence to the People's Liberation Movement'.<sup>225</sup> This meant that the Muslim collaborationist forces had been co-opted by, and subsumed within, the Partisans. Following the liberation of Tuzla, the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps reported: 'The liberation of Tuzla represented a turning point in the flow of events in East Bosnia. The Muslim legion in all parts has been put under our command.' The Staff pursued a policy of including the Muslim militia in the Partisan mobile units wherever possible as a means of ensuring their active participation in the struggle. Insofar as not all sections of the legions could be included in the mobile units, they were incorporated into the Partisan detachments.<sup>226</sup> The Staff reported further on 16 October 1943 that the Muslim militias in East Bosnia had generally ceased to fight against the Partisans, with the exception of the Kladanj legion. The Home Guard garrisons had adopted a purely defensive stance and their morale was low. In this context: 'We have begun to work on the rapid inclusion of the Muslim legions and the Muslims generally in our units. In order better to fulfil this task, we have formed a Muslim brigade.'<sup>227</sup>

The significance of the Muslim role in the liberation of Tuzla was not that it showed massive popular support for the Partisans. The Tuzla Muslim elite by no means went over to the Partisans heart and soul and most of its members remained outside the new structures erected by the Partisans during their stay in the town. The entry of a minority of individuals from among the Muslim elite and the Muslim military formations into the Partisans reflected rather the readiness of this minority to participate actively in the revolution and of the majority to acquiesce in it. The actively pro-Partisan Muslim minority served as the link between the NOP and the Muslim population. By entering the NOP it acted as guarantor before the latter of Partisan respect for Muslim security, and conversely it acted as the Communists' anchor among the Muslim population, a means of influencing and directing them without recourse to repression. The Muslims were



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much less polarised by the war than either the Serbs or the Croats in Yugoslavia as a whole, and were less ready to kill members of their own nation. With the autumn of 1943 the Partisans definitely acquired mass support, though by no means overwhelming support, among the Bosnian Muslims; the active collaboration of a minority, though by no means the majority, among the Muslim elite; and the passive acquiescence of most, though by no means all of the Muslim population as a whole. This was more than either the Ustashes or the Chetniks were ever able to achieve and effectively determined the outcome of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Muslim militiamen who joined the Partisans did not simply become loyal followers of the Communists, but tended to maintain their own outlook and even policy. The Great Župan Ragib Čapljić did not actively collaborate with the NOP, despite the fact that his daughter was an NOP activist. His release from Partisan captivity was arranged by Filipović, who also helped save two Tuzla Home Guard officers who had refused to join the Partisans. On account of their lack of confidence in him, the Partisans did not allow Filipović to assume the role of Partisan Local Commander for the town, a post that went instead to Omer Gluhić. But Gluhić himself then released Major Hadžiefendić and two other members of the Tuzla elite considered enemies by the Communists and was soon after removed from his post.<sup>228</sup>

Filipović and Gluhić, despite their unquestionably earnest participation in the NOP, were representative of the continuation of a Muslim current with a specific sense of identity within the movement. The Staff of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division reported on 13 November that in south-east Bosnia ‘an overwhelming majority of the militiamen are friendly in their attitude toward our NOV [People’s Liberation Army]’, although ‘certain fascist and reactionary elements could employ that militia on the occupiers’ orders against us’. The militias were to be brought into the Partisan army rather than be permitted to exist as autonomous forces on liberated territory; nevertheless, the narrowly Muslim and localist consciousness of their fighters would be satisfied where possible through their organisation in Muslim brigades and local detachments and guards.<sup>229</sup> In this way, the institution of the Muslim militia would enjoy a shadow of continuity within the Partisan movement, much as did the autonomous Chetnik bands and the Home Guard officer corps. Just as the KPJ in 1941–42 did not have enough cadres to ensure subordination to its political goals of the Serb rebel bands, so in late 1943 it lacked sufficient numbers of Muslim cadres to integrate the mass of Muslim militiamen and civilians who had gone over to the Partisans that autumn.<sup>230</sup>

In summing up the reasons for the Partisans’ success in winning over the Muslims of north-east Bosnia, the NDH’s Chief Directorate for Public Order and Security stressed the ‘Great Serb propaganda spread in recent days among us, about how East Bosnia would be annexed to Serbia’, which ‘had a terrible influence on the Croat masses, particularly on the Muslims’. This sense of mistrust of the NDH by the Muslims began:

on the very moment when the Croatian State government formed a pact with the Chetniks and formally recognised the latter—although only tacitly—as allies, and that moment when the Muslim masses saw that the work of the Croatian military and particularly the Croatian Home Guard authorities was supported by the German armed forces.

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The 'culmination of all this was reached with the quickest agreement and cooperation between the German police and Gestapo and the Chetniks. This was the spark that set alight the bitter and despondent Muslim masses, who sought salvation outside the framework of Croatian state politics.' Following the collapse of the Domdo legions, this salvation was sought through:

the incorporation of these forces in the Partisan ranks, which appeared at the moment when the Muslims clearly and openly saw that their only way out was through the ranks of those formations, which did not burn and did not destroy openly their population, and this was precisely the Partisans.

The Muslims 'saw that the Chetniks burn Muslim villages and kill Muslim women and children and they likewise saw the complete incompetence of the Croatian armed forces, which were not able to prevent the eruption of the Great Serb tyranny'. Nevertheless, it was that section of the Muslim population that 'gravitated toward Tuzla itself' that was '90 per cent a-national', while that which 'lay on the frontier itself continues to think in a Croat manner...' In other words, the Muslims along the frontier with Serbia remained loyal to the NDH, whereas those under the influence of Tuzla were pro-Partisan.<sup>231</sup>

The Partisans attempted to follow up their capture of Tuzla by attacking the strategically important town of Brčko, which guarded German communications between Belgrade and Zagreb as well as the approaches to the Tuzla basin. According to a non-Communist eyewitness, the Brčko Croat businessman Mirko Sančević, the Partisans attacked confidently in the belief that the Brčko Home Guard would surrender the town to them. In the event this failed to happen, and the Partisans were defeated after a ferocious struggle.<sup>232</sup> This is testimony to the difficulty experienced by the Partisans in capturing large towns without the collaboration of Home Guards and to the vital difference that the defection of Filipović's circle made to the outcome of the Tuzla operation.

The liberation of Tuzla delivered the greater part of East Bosnia to the control of the Partisans' 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps.<sup>233</sup> In this period the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps liberated all Romanija, Višegrad, Goražde, Foča, Kalinovik and Vareš, so that all East Bosnia was liberated except a few strongholds, above all the town of Brčko and, of course, Sarajevo. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps by the second half of November numbered 8,525 Partisans organised in two divisions, seven brigades, ten detachments, two hospitals and a mountain battery.<sup>234</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps numbered by the start of November 9,804 Partisans, organised in two divisions, twelve detachments and two artillery units.<sup>235</sup> By early the next month the Bosnian Partisan forces as a whole amounted to two corps, six divisions, fifteen brigades and thirty detachments.<sup>236</sup> There were at this time over 35,000 Partisans in Bosnian units. According to Tito: 'Bosnia is almost completely liberated, except for several towns.' The Bosnian forces would, 'since they are resolving the situation in their own sector', form 'a strategic reserve, most probably toward the east'. The 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Corps, numbering around 20,000, was also situated in East Bosnia and in the Užice sector of western Serbia. Tito continued to aim at an invasion of Serbia from East Bosnia and the Sanjak as soon as conditions were favourable and not later than the opening of the Allied Second Front in Europe.<sup>237</sup>

The liberation of Tuzla turned East Bosnia, from the point of view of the Supreme Staff, into a springboard for the launching of a Partisan offensive into

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Serbia. In this way the reconquest of Serbia, as the Yugoslav heartland, was dependent upon a prior political-military victory in East Bosnia involving the winning over of the Muslim militias and masses and their mobilisation on a Bosnian-patriotic basis. Tito planned in November to expand the operations of the 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Corps in East Bosnia and to liberate Sarajevo, in order to form as strong as possible a base for his push eastward. He intended to enlist the help of Allied aircraft for his attack on Sarajevo.<sup>238</sup>

On 15 November Tito ordered that while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps should 'take measures to defeat the Germans at Tuzla', it should also 'maintain not less than one good division on Romanija in preparation for our eventual attack on the city of Sarajevo'. He requested the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps to 'provide your opinion in that regard and on how many forces would be needed'.<sup>239</sup> On behalf of the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for East Bosnia, Pašaga Mandžić wrote on 20 November to the Party organisations of East Bosnia and of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps:

We must pursue a course so that, in East Bosnia, we create the conditions for the carrying of the People's Liberation Struggle across the Drina, into Serbia, to assist the Serbian People's Liberation Struggle. We must, therefore, create from East Bosnia a hotbed of the People's Liberation Struggle, in opposition to the efforts of the Great Serb Chetnik monsters from Serbia and Bosnia to turn East Bosnia, with the help of the occupiers, into their base.

It was for this reason, stressed Mandžić, that 'our party organisation should strengthen itself as quickly as possible and consolidate itself organisationally'.<sup>240</sup> However, the Germans responded to the gathering of Partisan forces in East Bosnia by reinforcing their garrison in Sarajevo. This, combined with Tito's preoccupation with the Second Session of AVNOJ, led to the postponement of Partisan plans to liberate the Bosnian capital. The Partisans' position in Bosnia remained fragile, something that the stunning victories of September and October concealed but did not alter.

### *The rebellion of the Muslim notables*

Different overlapping factions and currents of opinion existed in the world of the Muslim political elite: pro-Croat and pro-Serb; pro-Ustasha, pro-Partisan and pro-Chetnik; and pro-German, pro-Italian and pro-Allied. Most remained broadly committed to the same basic goals: defence of the existence of the Muslims as a distinct national community and of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a distinct entity. Those that abandoned these goals did so at the price of their support among the Muslim population. The military disasters that befell the Axis powers on the Russian front, in North Africa and in Italy, coupled with the obvious impending collapse of the NDH, led one circle among the Muslim elite to seek salvation for itself and for the Muslim population generally through defection to the NOP.

The exact contours of this circle, its membership and the extent of its existence as a distinct political formation are unknown. In all likelihood it was a loose network of acquaintances who kept each other informed of events and attempted to coordinate their policies of the moment. It included among its adherents Filipović, Hafiz Muhamed efendi Pandža, Muhamed Sudžuka, Hamdija Čemerlić, Zaim Šarac and others, each of whom was connected to other Muslim notables

of various political currents whom they could attempt to draw along. The solidarity among these members of the Muslim elite transcended political alliances with non-Muslims, it being generally recognised among them that the Muslim elite needed feet in different camps. Filipović allegedly wrote to Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović to inform him that he was collaborating with the Partisans and Hadžihasanović allegedly approved this, stating: 'let us be both here and there'. Hadžihasanović died shortly afterwards; a Serb fellow-tradesman whom he had saved from an Ustaša prison spoke at his funeral at the Beg's Mosque in the Sarajevo old town.<sup>241</sup> Insofar as the pro-Partisan Muslim circle had any ideological or organisational particularity, this may have derived from Gajret, to which many of its adherents had belonged.

The leadership of Bosnian Partisans sought to maximise the growing Muslim support for their movement through a concerted effort to win over prominent figures from Muslim public life as a bridge to the Muslim masses. According to the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina's report of 12 November 1943:

We must endeavour to link ourselves more strongly with the Muslim and Croat masses and, through linking ourselves with prominent political figures from their ranks, to establish a front of Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the People's Liberation Struggle, through which we can draw the Croat and Muslim masses into the People's Liberation Movement and accelerate their mobilisation into our army.<sup>242</sup>

The NOP won a particularly powerful collaborator in the autumn of 1943, when Lieutenant-Colonel Šefket Hasandedić, Chief of Staff of the Home Guard 3<sup>rd</sup> Military District and the man whom Pandža had suggested in October 1942 as commander of the Muslim quisling army, began to supply military information to the Partisans. He would subsequently defect to them outright.<sup>243</sup> It was believed also that Dr Šefkija Behmen, a former Yugoslav Government minister and pro-Serbian rival to the pro-Croatian Džafer Kulenović for leadership of the JMO, was on the verge of joining the NOP. Behmen was thought to want to rehabilitate the JMO within the framework of the NOP. He edged towards declaring for the latter but was also appealed to by the Chetniks and remained undecided as to his course of action.<sup>244</sup>

For the recruitment of the Muslim militia and the East Bosnian Muslim population generally into the NOP, the Communists were dependent upon the assistance of sympathetic Muslim notables. Among the most important of these were Filipović and Ismet Bektašević. The latter was a pre-war parliamentary delegate for the Srebrenica District and member of the JMO General Council. In 1941 Bektašević had formed a Muslim militia and eagerly participated in the confiscation of weapons from the Serb population and the arrest of local Serb politicians.<sup>245</sup> He nevertheless went over to the Partisans on 15 October 1943 following the liberation of Tuzla—possibly as a member of the same circle as Filipović, Sudžuka, Pandža and Čemerlić—taking with him the Muslim militia units loyal to him. He turned up in Partisan Tuzla to request that he be given military experts and political commissars. Bektašević expressed his readiness to fight with his militia on the side of the Partisans and accepted the command of the Supreme Staff, despite being a member of the NDH assembly. The Provincial Committee said of him that 'we shall be reserved in our attitude towards him, for he is connected to

the Tuzla *begs*, but we deem that today we need him until we are solidly tied to the Muslim masses that continue to follow him. It is our task gradually to isolate him and to tie ourselves directly to the Muslim masses from his region'.<sup>246</sup>

As the most high-ranking and influential member of the JMO to belong to the NOP since the death of Nurija Pozderac, Bektašević was selected to be a member of the Presidium of ZAVNOBiH and councillor at the Second Session of AVNOJ. With Bektašević's help the Partisans mobilised former Muslim legionnaires into the Srebrenica, Kladanj and Tuzla Detachments, though only the last of these reached any size in this period. The Srebrenica Detachment was established in September 1943 as essentially a Muslim legion under the Partisan banner, comprising members of the Srebrenica Muslim legion that had gone over to the Partisans. The detachment was under the control of Bektašević and its independently minded commander, the former Muslim legion commander Edhem Efendić, both of whom continued to vacillate between the Partisans and the Ustasas. Meša Selimović, who became political commissar of the detachment in October, described Bektašević thus:

For the commander [*sic*] of the detachment, the corps appointed a true *beg*, a feudal lord, the proprietor of *chifliks* and serfs. In one house, high up on the hill, under the mountain, his armed minions—peasants—guarded him by night, and in his house, apart from maid-servants and other servants, was an educated governess for his two children. I understood that fantastic move by the staff of the corps when I learnt that the *beg* was the first person among the Muslims, a former Yugoslav senator and very favourably inclined toward the Serbs.<sup>247</sup>

In December 1943 the Ustasas attacked the Srebrenica Detachment, killed Efendić and captured Bektašević, who thereupon resumed collaboration with them.<sup>248</sup> Setting up his office in Bratunac, he co-opted NOP supporters and helped to recruit Muslims into the Handschar Division.<sup>249</sup> He was subsequently executed by the Partisans. Former Chetnik Vojvoda Pero Đukanović, a native of the same region, records feeling sorry for Bektašević following his fall from grace and that he did not believe him to be a genuine Ustasha criminal. Đukanović visited Bektašević in prison prior to his execution.<sup>250</sup>

In contrast to Bektašević, Filipović proved to be the most loyal and pliant high-ranking Muslim notable to join the NOP. On 14 October Čolaković repeated his earlier recommendation of him, describing him as a 'good soldier and an extremely diligent person' and suggesting that he should be recruited to the Supreme Staff: 'Not because of him, but because of the Muslim masses', since 'he joined us earnestly; he enjoys a standing among our Muslims, who would, with his recruitment to the S[upreme] S[taff], see yet another proof that it is only in the P[ople's] L[iberation] Movement that they are guaranteed equality'.<sup>251</sup> Filipović also wrote to his former schoolfriend Hasan Miljković, the mayor of Velika Kladuša, appealing to him to rejoin the NOP. He argued that Hitler was the incarnation of evil and had lost the war and that it was therefore imperative for the Muslims to participate in his defeat:

Hitler is losing the war and will lose it even if all Muslims, all Croats and all Serbs go to his aid. He cannot win because he has the entire civilised world and all humanity against him. All who love freedom and justice have risen against him, for it is clear to everyone how he

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wishes to order Europe. He has demonstrated this in the occupied countries. He roasts, burns and kills the most innocent. He does not spare anyone in Croatia either. He destroys alike everything that is Muslim just like everything Serb and Croat. It is not known whether more Muslim villages have been burned by the Chetniks or by the Germans. I have documents showing that they killed even the families of those who joined the SS Division. Hitler seeks living space by enslaving other nations. He would not once hesitate to destroy us or to sacrifice us to a black gypsy if that were in his interest even for a moment. Today he would sacrifice us, tomorrow the Croats, the day after the Serbs and so on according to his needs. Is it possible for us to serve and defend him whom humanity views as the worst criminal in the world and who is the enemy of our people too? Are we allowed to help him through our passivity? Can we bet on a losing card? Would this not be equivalent to carrying out an assassination of ourselves and our people? Are we really going to be suicides and our own grave-diggers?<sup>252</sup>

Filipović warned Miljković that Hitler had neither the will nor the interest to defend the Muslims. 'He has shown this by offering Nedić Bosnia-Hercegovina. And what awaits you and everyone else from Nedić? The death and destruction that the Chetniks are openly emphasising.' This was, Filipović argued, to be expected also from the Yugoslav government-in-exile. By contrast: 'Things are wholly different where the People's Liberation Movement is concerned. Those are patriots from Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Dalmatia—all selfless people both prominent and known.' The NOP had recruited a large proportion of the Muslim middle classes: 'In those ranks are to be found a very large number of our intellectuals, lawyers, professors, doctors, *hodjas*, *hadjis*, engineers, teachers, officers and all others.' The NOP was fighting, Filipović went on, for the fulfilment of the Muslims' traditional national goals:

You are surely aware of the decisions of the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia. It has transformed itself into a legislative body that has passed a legal decision for a federal and democratic arrangement for Yugoslavia in which Bosnia-Hercegovina will be a separate unit with its own government, equal to Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. The brotherhood and equality of all the nations of Yugoslavia has been proclaimed unanimously, spontaneously and earnestly, by which we Muslims too have been made equal to the others in all respects. Under such an order, there will be no oppressors or oppressed. Only in such a country will our survival and complete progress be guaranteed. For such an arrangement, the Muslims have always fought, but to be honest, our leadership always betrayed it and never achieved anything despite its collaboration with all regimes in the administration of the country.<sup>253</sup>

These arguments appear not to have convinced Miljković—who despite having collaborated with the Partisans briefly in the spring of 1942 was never to do so again—but they undoubtedly influenced many other educated Muslims who joined the NOP in this period.

Perhaps the most important notable to go over to the Partisans at this time was Muhamed Sudžuka, deputy Great Župan of Pliva and Rama, the province of the NDH centred on the town of Jajce. A veteran of the pre-war Muslim Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Hercegovina, former editor of the JMO newspaper *Pravda* and member of the General Council of Gajret, Sudžuka was a Muslim autonomist of Yugoslavist orientation, who had nevertheless enjoyed close links to

the Young Muslim organisation before and possibly after his defection to the Partisans.<sup>254</sup> As deputy Great Župan, Sudžuka had protected Serbs and Jews, and had secured the release of NOP activists arrested by the Ustasas, saving the lives of several.<sup>255</sup> His defection to the Partisans appears to have received wide backing from the Muslim population of his native region—the Muslims of Zenica were reported to have contributed 2,500 kunas to help finance that defection.<sup>256</sup> Vasilije Kovačević, an intelligence officer of the Supreme Staff, reported in mid October 1943 that Sudžuka's entry into the NOP had enormously boosted its support among the Muslims of his native Fojnica and that it would only be necessary for him to visit Fojnica and hold a single conference for the entire Muslim population of the region to abandon their neutrality and join the Partisans.<sup>257</sup>

Sudžuka's readiness to join the NOP, however, may have had its roots in an ideological affinity that dated back to before the war. Writing in 1933, Sudžuka argued that it was up to the Muslims to fulfil Bosnia-Hercegovina's destiny to be Yugoslavia's lynchpin. He wrote that the Muslims, because they and their homeland lay at the centre of the Serbo-Croat conflict, had a particular role to play in preserving Yugoslavia. According to Sudžuka, the 'Muslim element has been the most conservative guardian of the basic attributes of Yugoslav individuality', and 'Bosnia-Hercegovina represents the territorial axis of Yugoslavia'. In Bosnia-Hercegovina's role as the foundation stone and spiritual core of Yugoslavia, the 'starting point, despite their apparent insignificance' consists of the 'Bosnia-Hercegovinian Muslims, not primarily through their own national question but simultaneous with all the others'. The Bosnian Muslims were the core element of Yugoslavia: 'However it may at first appear paradoxical, upon the seventeenth part of the population of this state, that comprises the Bosnian-Hercegovinian Muslims, rests the most important initial burden of our common problem'.<sup>258</sup> This analysis proved to be highly prescient.

Sudžuka continued during and after his defection to the Partisans to hold this belief in the Muslims' central importance for Yugoslav unity.<sup>259</sup> Sudžuka's proposal from 1933, that Gajret and Narodna Uzdanica—the pro-Serb and pro-Croat Muslim cultural societies respectively—should be merged into a unified all-Muslim cultural society, which would in turn merge with Prosvjeta and Napredak, the cultural societies of the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats respectively, in order to unify the Bosnian intelligentsia,<sup>260</sup> was enacted by the Communist regime after the war.

### *The rebellion beyond East Bosnia*

The Muslim population of north-east Bosnia swung decisively towards the Partisans in the autumn of 1943 and changed the balance of forces in the country. Muslim support for the Partisans in the western part of the country, in Bosanska Krajina, had enjoyed a steadier rise during the first two and a half years of the war on account of the stronger Communist organisations in that area, but there was no such swing of opinion in the autumn of 1943; the Muslims had a weaker tradition of autonomist mobilisation and were less inclined to act in unison. Bosanska Krajina was the Bosnian Partisan heartland, and Partisan support there was strong,



if uneven. The Axis powers inflicted heavy losses on the civilian population of Bosanska Krajina during 1943, but did not shake popular support for the Partisans, except in the areas of Manjača, Mrkonjić Grad and Glamoč, which were anyway pro-Chetnik.<sup>261</sup> During the summer, the NDH forces in Bosanska Krajina crumbled as Partisan strength grew: the Great Župan of Lašva and Glaž reported to the NDH Interior Ministry on 17 August 1943 that all Home Guard forces had withdrawn from Mrkonjić Grad, Jajce and Bugojno, along with all state offices, in expectation of a Partisan entry into the towns.<sup>262</sup> With Italy on the verge of capitulation, the Germans withdrew their forces from western and central Bosnia and relocated them on the coast, strengthening the hand of the Partisans, who poised themselves for further successes.

Until the autumn of 1943 the Muslim population of Bosanska Krajina looked upon the Partisans with increasing favour, but was still not ready to join them *en masse*. The agitation of the NOP in the towns, the Partisans' frequent entry into the towns and their relatively good behaviour towards the citizenry, the news of German defeats on the Eastern front and above all the atrocities of the Chetniks and the complete discrediting of the Ustashes—all this combined to draw the Bosanska Krajina Muslims towards the NOP. Simultaneously, however, fear of Chetnik or German retaliation and the inability of the Partisans to offer adequate protection kept the mass of the Muslims from actively expressing this support. Paradoxically, in the region of Travnik, Jajce and Bugojno the absence of a significant Chetnik presence made the Muslims less afraid of retaliation, therefore readier to join the Partisans, and there the latter did succeed in mobilising them. In general the Muslims of the towns, relatively educated and in close contact with the urban NOP, were—particularly the youth—relatively ready to join the Partisans, while the rural Muslims remained reserved. The greatest readiness to join the Partisans was among the Muslims of the Prozor region, where the population was overwhelmingly Muslim and Croat and the Muslims consequently viewed the Ustashes rather than the Chetniks as the principal threat.<sup>263</sup> In the area immediately to the east of Banja Luka, fear of the Chetniks prevented the Muslims joining the Partisans in large numbers up until the autumn of 1943.<sup>264</sup> Thanks to the increase in Partisan military power, the Muslims in that area began to join the Partisans in significant numbers towards the end of the year.<sup>265</sup>

Between Bosanska Krajina and East Bosnia lay Central Bosnia, with a proportionately larger Muslim population than Bosanska Krajina but one that was more closely interwoven with the significant Croat population of the region. In Central Bosnia and the adjacent areas of northern Hercegovina, there was a significant swing of support towards the Partisans in the summer and autumn of 1943, but this was subject to considerable local variation and depended greatly upon local Croat behaviour. For whereas in some areas the Central Bosnian Croats themselves turned towards the Partisans, in others they remained firmly pro-Ustasha and often anti-Muslim. Many different permutations of Muslim and Croat behaviour vis-à-vis the Partisans were possible in these conditions.

'The feelings of the Muslims towards the Independent State of Croatia in Zenica and the surrounding area have recently greatly worsened; there is an ever greater feeling of hatred and mistrust towards the existing order', stated a UNS report in late August 1943; 'the up-till-now friendly feelings of the Muslims

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towards the German Reich have significantly cooled and become strained', for 'they are linked to the successes on the battlefield'. The report noted that even the Muslim organisations recognised by the state—El-Hidaje, Narodna Uzdanica and Merhamet—were now obstructing all efforts by the Usthas to mobilise Muslim youth or inculcate Croat national feelings. The Zenica Muslims were highly unwilling to serve in the Home Guard. The report said of the Zenica Muslims that 'towards the Chetniks they are openly hostile while towards the Partisans, in recent times, there has arisen a certain sympathy and they are friendly toward them'. One local teacher was reported as saying: 'For us Muslims there is no salvation, for if the Germans win the war we'll be destroyed by the Croats and if the English win the war we'll be destroyed by the Serbs—it's all the same to us. Only if Russia wins can we expect no harm to come to us, for the Russians do not persecute Islam, as we've learnt from many Caucasian soldiers who are now in the German Army.'<sup>266</sup> When the Partisans attacked Zenica in October, the town's Home Guard defenders offered no resistance and about fifty of them voluntarily joined the Partisans.<sup>267</sup>

'In Travnik and the surrounding area', according to a report of the UNS of late August, 'it is openly noticeable that the relations of the Muslims towards the Catholics are very poor. The Muslims have almost wholly distanced themselves from the Catholics; furthermore, they do not feel themselves to be Croats or wish to have anything to do with them.' Conversely, 'there is noticeable a great disturbance in Muslim circles. A particular sympathy for Communism, as well as for the Partisans, is noticeable among us. This sympathy is growing every day and is publicly noticeable.' This sympathy was particularly present among the younger generation, including the children of NDH officials. This expressed itself in a meeting between the Partisans and local Muslim youth at a village outside Travnik at the start of August and, a week later, in a second and much larger meeting between the Partisans and the Travnik Muslims at which the secretary of the Great Župan was present. About 800–1,000 Partisans and local Muslims attended this second meeting, which was intended to accelerate the mobilisation of the Muslims in the Partisans. A considerable number of Travnik Muslims joined the Partisans in this period.<sup>268</sup> When the Partisans attacked Travnik at about the same time, their success in advancing almost to the town was due to the information provided by the town's NOP organisation.<sup>269</sup> In this period, several Home Guards from Travnik, including two officers, defected to the Partisans.<sup>270</sup> When the Partisans attacked the nearby village of Turbe on 18 August, forty Home Guards defected to them, followed by twelve more the following month. When the Partisans attacked Travnik on 9 September, twenty-five Home Guards went over to them.<sup>271</sup>

The towns of Fojnica and Kreševo were liberated by the 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division and a Visoko-Fojnica Detachment established on 17 July 1943. The Okrug Committee for Prozor was claiming by October that in the Prozor region 'the Muslims are wholly aligned on the side of the People's Liberation Struggle', while in Fojnica the Muslims were 'on the way to active involvement in the People's Liberation Struggle'. Although the Croats in Prozor were reserved toward the Partisans, in Fojnica they were more sympathetic, 'therefore we have activated there the HSS and established a People's Liberation Front'.<sup>272</sup> Nevertheless, two members of the Staff of the Visoko-Fojnica Detachment were executed by the

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Partisans as Ustasha agents the following summer; the loyalty of many individuals remained uncertain.<sup>273</sup>

The Croatian Partisans held the second session of their national assembly, the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia, on 12–15 October 1943. It resolved in favour of a 'new, strong and democratic Yugoslavia' in which 'will live, in fraternal unity, a free Croatia with a free Serbia, a free Slovenia and with the other lands of the Slavic south'.<sup>274</sup> This was immediately preceded by the establishment of the 'Executive Committee of the Croatian Peasant Party' as a separate leadership organisation for HSS supporters who supported the Partisans. The blossoming Croatian Partisan movement, with its assertive expressions of Croatian patriotism and of Croatia's right to self-rule, catalysed the mobilisation of a significant minority of the Bosnian Croats into the NOP.

Among the Croat population of Central Bosnia, a number of local HSS politicians went over to the NOP in the summer and autumn of 1943, including the president of the Fojnica HSS district organisation Niko Tolo from Ščitova, Jozo Mihać from Fojnica and Jozo Marjanović from Gromiljak. This had a positive effect on the local Croat population's view of the NOP.<sup>275</sup> At the end of 1943 and beginning of 1944 there were several more prominent Croat and Muslim defections: the district superintendent of Visoko, Marko Šakić; the director of mines at Breza, Ćazim Ugljen; and Muhamed Spaho, son of Reis ul-Ulema Fehim efendi Spaho. Sudžuka, Tolo and Ugljen would all serve as delegates to ZAVNOBiH.<sup>276</sup> In the town of Vareš, two HSS politicians joined the NOO established by the Partisans.<sup>277</sup> During 1944 hundreds of Muslim and Croat militiamen and Home Guards from the region went over to the Partisans and thousands more simply surrendered their weapons and ended all resistance.<sup>278</sup> In the town of Bugojno, Muslim notables and HSS leaders came out in favour of the People's Liberation Struggle, enabling the Partisans to establish a branch of the People's Liberation Front in the town.<sup>279</sup>

Following the liberation of Tuzla, the Partisans enjoyed the assistance of members of the Tuzla HSS in their efforts to mobilise the Croats of Central Bosnia in the NOP. In the Prnjavor district in late 1943, the Communists used the Tuzla HSS members Aleksandar Preka and Jure Begić to organise meetings with local Croats.<sup>280</sup> In the Derventa district, the Communists used the Tuzla HSS member Ivica Martinović for the same purpose.<sup>281</sup> The Croat population of the region of Derventa and Doboј was, according to a Partisan report of this period, still overwhelmingly loyal to the HSS, but hostile to the Ustashes and favourable to the prospect of collaborating with the Partisans against them.<sup>282</sup>

In the town of Odžak in north-central Bosnia, the brief Partisan occupation in September enjoyed the collaboration of local Muslims.<sup>283</sup> To the west in the Prnjavor region, an area of strong Serb support for the Chetniks, local Muslims were by late August 1943 turning towards the Partisans for protection from the latter, first by seeking arms and later by seeking mobilisation in the Partisans' locally based detachments.<sup>284</sup> This was still a minority phenomenon, as fear of the Chetniks tended to cow the Muslims in many areas into passivity vis-à-vis the Partisan-Chetnik conflict, something that changed only gradually from late 1943 onward. The Muslims of north-central Bosnia led the way in this process, and by September local Communists reported that 'the Muslims are ever more actively

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joining our struggle'.<sup>285</sup> On 30 October the Tešanj-Teslić Detachment disarmed 120 troops of the Teslić Domdo Battalion, with the help of an NOP agent in the ranks of the latter. The Domdo troops surrendered without a struggle and ten joined the Partisans.<sup>286</sup>

The Communists treated the non-Ustasha sections of the Croat militia with the same circumspection that they employed with the Muslim militia. On 12 October 1943 units of the 12<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade and the Tešanj-Teslić Detachment entered the village of Veliki Prnjavor, overcoming resistance from the Croat militia. The militia sergeant Pejo Tadić was captured and through him the Partisans made contact with other Croat militia leaders and local HSS members, following which the Partisans were granted free passage through the village of Foča. When the Partisans then attacked the enemy stronghold of Kotorsko they were joined in the fighting against the Home Guards and gendarmes by units of the Croat militia.<sup>287</sup> In the village of Komušina, members of the Croat militia were favourably impressed when in late 1943 or early 1944 the 13<sup>th</sup> Croatian Proletarian Brigade 'Rade Končar' arrived in the locality, made up primarily of Croats from Croatia, many of whom were practising Catholics. This helped overcome the mutual hostility between the villagers and the local Bosnian Partisans, and laid the basis for the eventual entry of Komušina Croats into the Partisans.<sup>288</sup>

In other parts of the country, cracks increasingly showed in the facade of Croat support for the NDH. This was related both to the massive influx of Croats into the Partisans in Croatia, particularly in Dalmatia, and to the consequent increasing Axis repression against the Croat population. In January 1944 German soldiers burned and plundered several Croat villages in the vicinity of Slavonski Brod, even though many of the families whose homes they destroyed had members in the Home Guard.<sup>289</sup> In early 1944 German repression of the Croat population of the Dalmatian coast (which after Italy's capitulation was entirely incorporated into the NDH, barring the city of Zadar and the southern tip bordering Montenegro) verged on the genocidal. Here, the Croat population was overwhelmingly pro-Partisan and fearing an Allied landing on the Croatian coast the Germans during 1944 evacuated the entire combat-age male Croat population of the coast and islands, including the entire population of villages and islands; tens of thousands of people were affected.<sup>290</sup>

In the Croat-majority areas of south-west Bosnia and western Hercegovina, a large part of which was under the jurisdiction of the Croatian Partisans and the KPH, the increase in Croat support for the NOP was part of the growth of the Croatian Partisan movement. In Ljubuški, a Partisan leaflet of September 1943 claimed: 'Our Croatian nation has in the course of this armed struggle created its General Staff of Croatia and its highest political leadership in the form of the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia, under the great Croatian poet Vladimir Nazor.' It urged the Croats of Ljubuški to 'behold the heroic struggle that is spreading across the whole of Dalmatia and our Croatia and which has for two years already been sacrificing its lives for the freedom and true independence of the Croatian nation'.<sup>291</sup> In this period, the UNS recorded a collapse in support for the Ustasha order among the Croats of Ljubuški.<sup>292</sup> The district NOO of Livno sent a directive in November 1943 to the subordinate municipal NOO of Podhum, noting: 'In today's difficult times the destiny of all

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nations is being resolved on battlefields. The destiny of the Croatian nation, too, will be resolved on the battlefield.' With this in mind, it called upon the Podhum NOO to summon a meeting of representatives of its villages, with the aim of 'realising our Croatian right and ensuring for ourselves a dignified life in the international community of other peoples'.<sup>293</sup>

Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, German commander in the south-east (Army Group F) reported at the start of November 1943 that, except within Zagreb, 'there no longer exists *any kind of Croatian state authority*, even in those parts of the country still held by Croatian troops. The people and the army, and recently also the Ustasha militia, irresistibly yield before the demands of the rebels for food, clothing, armaments, information, etc' [emphasis in the original]. Furthermore, 'The Croatian army is of no account, for it is collapsing more and more. This collapse can no longer be stalled by organisational means nor by promises. The Croatian soldier no longer has faith in the Croatian state.'<sup>294</sup>

### *The Muslim Liberation Movement*

Sometime in the autumn of 1943 Hafiz Muhamed efendi Pandža summoned several members of the Muslim elite known to be pro-Partisan to his office at the High Islamic Council; they were Lieutenant Hasan Ljubunčić of the former Yugoslav Army, Judge Behaudin Salihagić, Judge Bećir Omersoftić and Home Guard Lieutenant-Colonel Šefket Hasandedić. He informed his guests of his determination to 'go to the forest' and collaborate with the Partisans, his intention being apparently to form a guerrilla army on the Partisan model to defend the Muslim population from the Chetniks and Ustashes.<sup>295</sup> This decision was made with the approval of other Muslim notables, including Mehmed Handžić, Mustafa Softić, Zaim Šarac and Husein Kadić. It was, according to Pandža's testimony, coordinated with the defections of Sudžuka and Filipović to the Partisans.<sup>296</sup>

Pandža left Sarajevo on 20 October in the company of about twenty members of the Young Muslims to form a 'Muslim Liberation Movement' that would fight against both the Ustashes and the Chetniks independently of the Partisans. Drawing his first recruits from among the Muslim militias in the area to the south of Sarajevo, he succeeded in raising a militia of 4–500. He issued a proclamation claiming that 'Bosnia-Hercegovina has for centuries lived its independent life. The people were in harmony with one another regardless of religion and lived in brotherly love'. Pandža called in the name of the Muslim citizenry for an 'autonomous Bosnia in which all will have equal rights regardless of religion: Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics'. He demanded that Bosnia-Hercegovina break all links with the NDH, establish its own government and obtain independent representation at the future peace conference. He called upon the Muslims to fight for the 'security of our families and our homes' and the 'security of our Orthodox and Catholic neighbours'.<sup>297</sup> Given the closeness of his stated aims to those of the Partisans, Pandža immediately sought friendly relations with the latter.<sup>298</sup> The example provided by Pandža's act of rebellion increased the ferment in the ranks of the Muslims and their readiness to turn against the Ustashes.<sup>299</sup>

Pandža was captured by Partisans of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Krajina Brigade on 10 November. His interrogation by the Partisans revealed the extent to which his political agenda overlapped with theirs. Pandža claimed that he had launched his rebellion:

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For the purpose of assembling the Muslims and informing them that they must finally break all links with the Ustasha Croatian state and the occupiers; that they must further work to establish interreligious peace and as close a cooperation as possible between the individual confessions; and in order to inform the Muslims that they must finally give everything of themselves to establish an autonomous Bosnia-Hercegovina within a Yugoslav federal state or a Balkan union.

Pandža claimed that he had aimed at 'cooperation with all who wanted to help the people, and particularly with the People's Liberation Movement'. He argued that there were about 15,000 Muslims under arms in the south-eastern part of Bosnia-Hercegovina, of whom one-sixth were the official militia and the remainder independent bands; that these should be gathered together and strengthened with the addition of Muslim defectors from the Home Guard, Ustasas and German legions; and that 'all these should be assembled and organised as Muslim detachments of the People's Liberation Movement'. Pandža assured the Partisans he did not aim at any kind of autonomy for his forces within the People's Liberation Army and that he was convinced 'the question of the autonomy of Bosnia-Hercegovina cannot be resolved as a purely Muslim question, but only as a general national question, which all the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina must resolve according to their own will'. He assured them further that when the Handschar Division—which he himself had helped to recruit—arrived in Bosnia following its training abroad, it 'would not serve the occupiers but would serve the people'.<sup>300</sup>

Pandža thereupon declared his adherence to the NOP and issued a proclamation denouncing the Germans as responsible for the alleged massacre of 150,000 Muslims by the Chetniks and the Chetnik destruction of the towns of Rogatica and Višegrad. He stated:

The occupier is trying to throw a stumbling block among all of us. He wishes to destroy the Serbs and the Muslims and the Croats. It is high time that we opened our eyes and that we no longer allow him to play with our national destiny. It is time that we rose against the enemies of the people: the occupiers, Ustasas and Chetniks.

He called upon the Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina to join the Partisans:

When the Muslim population was bleeding terribly under the Chetnik knife, it was the Partisans alone who saved the people from complete annihilation. Today too, the People's Liberation Army is the only one that can guarantee the survival of the people and their happier future, for it is fighting for the pacification of the passions that have erupted among the people, for the equality of all the peoples of Yugoslavia—Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Slovenes and Macedonians. This People's Liberation Army is fighting for the freedom of our Bosnia in a powerful and free Yugoslavia in which all nations will have an equal right to decide their fate. All nations will be guaranteed their economic and spiritual life according to the traditions of their national pasts. Religious life will be guaranteed to all so that in our new Yugoslavia all will feel content, for there will be neither Great Serb nor Great Croat fanatics, who would wreck the people's peace and unity; nor will there be individual cliques who will take advantage of the people's good for their own profit.<sup>301</sup>

In his declaration for the Partisan cause, sincere or not, Pandža was the most prominent embodiment of the merging of the Partisan and Muslim autonomist currents.

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The East Bosnian Partisans believed Pandža could be used to increase Muslim support for the People's Liberation Movement. The political commissar of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division wrote on 12 November:

He [Pandža] is a very influential Muslim leader, above all because he is a prominent religious functionary. His personality could be well employed for the purpose of winning the support of the Muslims for our struggle as quickly as possible. So far as I can tell from this our first discussion, he is not a speculator. He behaves earnestly and does not conceal his earlier positions on various questions.<sup>302</sup>

Pandža was therefore assigned the role of breaking the enemy hold over the militia and facilitating its mobilisation in the People's Liberation Army. According to the Staff of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division on 13 November:

Conditions for bringing the majority of Muslim militiamen into our struggle are extremely favourable. Following our successes at Tuzla, as well as our successes in fighting against the Chetniks, as well as the defection of outstanding Muslim notables to our side, the mobilisation of Muslims into the ranks of our army can be carried out successfully.

In this context, 'we shall be helped by the defection of the well-known notable Hafiz Muhamed Pandža, who has already taken definite measures towards the organisation of a Muslim militia for the struggle against the Ustashas and Chetniks'.<sup>303</sup> The East Bosnian Partisan leadership appears to have viewed Pandža as a genuine fellow-traveller rather than as a captive or an ally of convenience.

Recalling his time as political commissar of the Tuzla Detachment, Selimović recalls: 'In the Spreča valley, Pandža helped us a lot, because in the mosques, after prayer, he spoke brilliantly of our revolution, as a political commissar of great stature.' Selimović describes one incident in particular, when Ferhad Azabagić, a Party official in the detachment whom he describes as a '*beg*', 'proposed that, as a sign of our goodwill, we present a rug to a new mosque in Gračanica', in order to placate the local Green Forces:

As the then Reis ul-ulema [*šić*] was then with the detachment, Ferhad persuaded him to hold on that occasion a ceremonial *džum* (a joint afternoon prayer on Friday), and that in the ceremonial sermon, he mention also the Partisan presentation of the rug. We did not agree to that; it was too demagogic and capitulationist, but Ferhad got his way, and he and the Reis ul-ulema performed the *džum* with the peasants, and the high Islamic functionary gave a rousing speech for the P[eo]ple's L[iberation] S[truggle] and the revolution. When we learnt this, it was too late to change anything, and pointless to punish the *beg*, for this event had reverberated in Spreča like a first-class sensation and totally changed the situation to our advantage. Ferhad *beg* knew well how to act with the peasants, but at the price of principles and ideological purity to which we young believers were greatly committed. We warned him not to do that any more, but we felt with joy how much easier from then on it was for us to move around in Spreča. We saw how sometimes prejudices, too, could be of use.<sup>304</sup>

The 'Reis' to whom Selimović refers appears to have been Pandža; though some of the details in Selimović's memoirs appear inaccurate, the latter captures the spirit of the NOP's embrace of Islam.

The Yugoslav Communist leadership nevertheless remained mistrustful of Pandža. On 14 November, Tito wrote to the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps: 'Pandža is a



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Gestapo agent and has received a radio station from the Gestapo. He supposedly deserted to the forest to organise Muslim units. Look after him well pending further orders.<sup>305</sup> The East Bosnian Partisans were nevertheless more ready to trust Pandža, and the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps replied to the Supreme Staff on 23 November 1943:

Pandža was, immediately upon joining us, ready to give a declaration that he had joined the People's Liberation Movement, to issue a proclamation to the Muslims in which he called upon them immediately to join our ranks, for that is, as he says today, the only salvation for them. He is ready to give a declaration in which he would condemn his earlier actions, that is his serving of the Germans for which, in his words, the Muslims have paid dearly. In our opinion, he is not giving such declarations today out of fear for his life, but because he is convinced that Hitler is losing the war quickly and definitely, that the position of the reaction in our country is among all our peoples tottering to the extent that they are threatened with a quick and final defeat, that the People's Liberation Army has become the powerful and decisive factor in our country, and maybe because he is convinced that within the framework of the People's Liberation Movement, as a nation-wide movement, will be resolved all the burning questions of the Muslims.<sup>306</sup>

The Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps was nevertheless aware that Pandža aimed to follow his own line within the NOP, one that was non-Communist and Muslim autonomist:

Of course, he believes that the main guarantee for that [resolution of the burning questions of the Muslims] is himself and others like him. What his intentions and those of others like him are is not difficult to determine. They have, according to him, sent Sudžuka to you. Taking all things into consideration, while they were serving the enemy, they did not have a clear picture of the strength and solidity of our movement. In all circumstances, in our belief, it would be very unjust in the present situation to liquidate Pandža, as a religious representative of the Muslims'.

Pandža, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps continued, was 'behaving better than all the Muslim notables who have gone over to us and is more competent than any of them'.<sup>307</sup> Tito consequently ordered them on 29 November to

Make use of Pandža in order to win the support of the Muslims, but make sure that he does not escape, because he has been an agent of the Gestapo all along. We have plenty of evidence against him. Behave well towards him and do not keep him imprisoned; I emphasise—be careful with him.<sup>308</sup>

According to Partisan sources, Tito's mistrust of Pandža proved to be justified, as Pandža was soon captured by the enemy and allegedly resumed collaboration. This is perhaps unfair, and may have been inspired merely by the Communists' desire to discredit him after he was anyway lost to them. It is possible that his resumed collaboration was not voluntary; certainly, his deposition to the Ustasha police in Zagreb on 21 January 1944, in which he apparently expressed his devotion to the NDH and to Croatian nationalism, was out of character with his politics since the start of the war, which had initially been strongly pro-German but nevertheless anti-Ustasha.<sup>309</sup> Be this as it may, in the short-term, his defection to the Partisans proved fruitful to them: in the Travnik region, his example encouraged a swing of Muslim opinion towards them.<sup>310</sup>

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## BOSNIAN ASSEMBLY AND YUGOSLAV FEDERATION

c. OCTOBER 1943–APRIL 1944

*However it may at first appear paradoxical, upon the seventeenth part of the population of this state, that comprises the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, rests the most important initial burden of our common problem.*

Muhamed Sudžuka, *Our Problem* (1933)<sup>1</sup>

The autumn of 1943 and the capitulation of Italy saw a great growth in the power of the NOP in western Yugoslavia, with the mass influx of non-Serbs into the Partisans—in particular Slovenes in Slovenia, Croats in Croatia and Muslims and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was a somewhat chaotic flowering, but such is the nature of revolutions. At the ground level, the pace of Communist state-building proceeded according to the strength of the Partisan movement. The great influx of Muslims and, to a lesser extent, Croats into the Bosnian Partisans in this period added a new dynamic to the process: the confidence of the Bosnian NOP leadership was tremendously boosted, but it also had to satisfy the national aspirations of new constituents through taking visible steps to establish Bosnian self-government. Meanwhile the capitulation of Italy and the increasing proximity of Western Allied troops prompted Tito to accelerate the founding of a new Yugoslav state. The Bosnian and Yugoslav state-building impulses therefore converged. In November 1943 the convening of the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, establishing a Bosnian assembly, and the Second Session of AVNOJ, establishing a new Yugoslav state on a federal basis, within which Bosnia would be one of six equal units, set the seal on this process and paved the way for the foundation of a Bosnian state.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the seat of the Yugoslav Partisan movement and the second-largest contributor of Partisan manpower among the Yugoslav lands, finally received a status equal to that of the other members of the embryonic Yugoslav

federation. The Muslims were implicitly, if not explicitly, recognised as equal in status to the other peoples of Bosnia and Yugoslavia. Non-Communist Bosnian notables and representatives of non-Communist Bosnian political parties—the JMO, HSS, Independent Democrats and League of Farmers—were prominently represented in ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ. These decisions and acts were important as propaganda for the further mobilisation of the population of Bosnia, particularly the Muslims, in the NOP. But if it was in large part the Bosnian Communists' assertiveness that ensured Bosnia would enjoy a place in the federation equal to other Yugoslav lands, this same assertiveness could lead to tension with other sections of the KPJ and even with Tito and the Central Committee of the KPJ themselves. Meanwhile the enemies of the Partisans sought to learn from the successes of the latter and adapt their anti-Partisan strategies accordingly.

### *Tito censures the Bosnian leadership*

The great expansion and successes of the Bosnian Partisan movement during the summer and autumn of 1943 coincided with the greatest crisis of the war in relations between the Bosnian and Yugoslav Communist leaderships, in which the latter censured the former. The Bosnian Communists, growing in power and confidence, jealously guarded their jurisdiction over Bosnia and its NOP against infringements from other sections of the Yugoslav Communist movement, to the extent that they came to be seen as overstepping their authority by the Central Committee. This reflected the fact that the Bosnian Communists were not simply cogs in a monolithic, top-down Yugoslav Communist machine, but also expressed specifically Bosnian tendencies and conditions.

The Yugoslav Partisans were a federally organised force, both in the military and in the political sense. This was necessary in view of the different conditions in each Yugoslav land, the difficulties that the Axis occupation posed for a centralised resistance movement and the various aspirations of the different Yugoslav peoples. Yet there was at all times an inherent tension between the all-Yugoslav dimension of the NOP and the particular needs of the movement in the respective individual lands. On occasion, the Partisan leadership of a particular land clashed with Tito's command. Although the powerful Croatian Partisan movement was most prone to independence vis-à-vis Tito, on occasion the Bosnian Communists overstepped the bounds of their authority as laid down by the latter. In the summer and autumn of 1943, as the Bosnian Partisans underwent a great expansion and scored a string of successes, this tension erupted. Communists were only rarely ready to challenge more senior Party bodies or individuals and the Bosnian Communist leaders were as obedient as most. But they were readier to resist horizontal encroachments on what they perceived to be their domain on the part of non-Bosnian Communists. During 1943 they clashed with both their Croatian and their Vojvodinian comrades over control of Partisan units and operations on Bosnian territory. It was in the second of these conflicts that the Central Committee was forced to step in.

The Partisan units formed in Cazinska Krajina, as a territory on the borderlands between the Croatian and Bosnian Communist organisations, became a source of discord between them. The 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade was in June 1943 the

object of a demarcation dispute between the Croatian and Bosnian Partisans when each tried to assume command over it. Initially assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division, the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade had in the spring of 1943 been transferred to the Kordun-Banija region of Croatia and joined the Una Operational Group under the command of the General Staff of Croatia, but retained links with the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina and the Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division. On 30 May the Staff of the newly formed 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps informed the General Staff of Croatia that it was assuming control over the Brigade, and requested that it relieve the latter of its current duties so that it might serve in Podgrmeč.<sup>2</sup> This was a response to the depletion of the forces under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps's disposal owing to the Partisan move eastward. The General Staff of Croatia initially ordered the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade to comply with this request, but subsequently countermanded its order and ordered the Brigade to remain in the Una Operational Group until further notice. This was contrary to the wishes of the Brigade's staff, which requested its transfer to Bosnian command. On 16 June the Staff of the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade wrote to the Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division expressing confusion over the conflict of orders and requesting that the matter be clarified.<sup>3</sup> The Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division replied to the Brigade Staff on 22 June and confirmed its transfer.<sup>4</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade was soon returned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division. Its staff blamed the Croatian General Staff for its lateness in responding to the order for the transfer. Whereas the latter claimed it had twice ordered the brigade to cross into Bosnian territory, the brigade's staff claimed that not only had it not received such orders but that it had twice received the contrary order to remain within the Una Operational Group and under the command of the Croatian General Staff. After its request to be allowed to rejoin the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division was ignored, the staff of the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade eventually abandoned its position unilaterally, crossed into Bosnia and informed the Croatian General Staff of the fact:

Taken as a whole, our activity in collaboration with the General Staff of Croatia, via the Una Operational Group, and their attempts to draw our brigade into the framework of their operational plans had as a consequence the obstruction of our goals, which we received before our departure for Kordun and Banija.<sup>5</sup>

A similar conflict occurred over the Cazin Detachment, whose establishment the 5<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Corps ordered on 25 August 1943. On 1 November 1943 the staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps complained to the staff of the Cazin Detachment:

From that time [25 August] until today, the Staff of that detachment has not sent this Staff any kind of report of its numbers and armaments, nor a report of its actions. You have probably sent these reports to the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Croatian Corps under whose provisional command you have fallen, of which you have not informed us at all.

The staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps thereupon informed the staff of the Cazin Detachment that the latter was henceforth under its command and was obliged to send it regular and detailed reports.<sup>6</sup>

The Bosnian Partisans' demarcation dispute with their Vojvodinian counterparts, in contrast to that with the Croatians, ultimately dragged in the Central Committee, which did more direct monitoring of events in Bosnia than in Croa-

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tia. The presence of the Yugoslav Supreme Staff and Central Committee on the one hand and of the Bosnian General Staff and Provincial Committee on the other in East Bosnia in the first half of 1942 generated significant tension between the two leaderships, as their strategic priorities and their lines of authority over subordinate Partisan units overlapped and became confused.<sup>7</sup> The retreat of the Supreme Staff and Proletarian units to Bosanska Krajina in the summer and autumn of 1942 left the General Staff and Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina in East Bosnia at the head of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade and the Birač Detachment, which together formed an autonomous political-military force. From November 1942, therefore, there were formally two Partisan staffs with jurisdiction over all forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina: the staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps in western Bosnia and the General Staff of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the east. The separation created new tensions in the relationship between the Yugoslav and Bosnian Partisan leaderships.

On 12 January 1943 Tito complained in an order to the staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade:

For a long time now we have had no news from you. We do not know the situation at your end, nor the development of military-political conditions in East Bosnia, where you have been for such a long time. It surprises us that you have not endeavoured to establish contact with us and to report to us regularly concerning everything, although you have been in a position to do so.<sup>8</sup>

The following day Tito repeated to Avdo Humo as the Organisational Secretary of the Provincial Committee the complaint that 'For a long time now we have had no news of you, nor of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade.'<sup>9</sup> On 20 February Tito rebuked Iso Jovanović, Political Secretary of the Provincial Committee, for failing to move the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade south to attack the German forces in the Igman region in order to reduce the military pressure on the Chief Operational Group during the Fourth Enemy Offensive.<sup>10</sup>

On 10 April Tito held a meeting with the Provincial Committee and the Staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade at the village of Govzi to receive from them a full report on the development of the NOP in north-east Bosnia. The 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and 1<sup>st</sup> Majevisa Brigades were incorporated in the Chief Operational Group and participated from that point on in the Battle of the Sutjeska. The General Staff for Bosnia-Herzegovina appears at this point to have been formally dissolved by the Supreme Staff. This seemed to remove the source of tension, but it appears that the Bosnian Communists were not happy with the loss of control. When, following the Battle of the Sutjeska, the Chief Operational Group advanced northward through East Bosnia, Humo on 27 June sought the return of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade to the Provincial Committee's area of operations further north, citing the need for the Brigade to rest, recover and replenish its ranks. Humo apparently feared the collapse of the unit and in this he was supported by the staffs of both the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and the 15<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigades.

Humo's request was rejected by the Central Committee and he was rebuked on its behalf by Sreten Žujović-Crni, who argued:

it is not only a question of these two brigades but of your stance in general towards the problems that lie before us today. In your view of the relations between the development

of the People's Liberation Struggle and the role and possibilities and capabilities for action of the People's Liberation Army, and finally the action of our Party and of our Party organisations, there is a definite clash. That clash enables and conditions the narrowness of your viewpoint, limits your perspective and localises you, so that you can fall into the error of forming in your head some specific, purely 'Bosnian'—I put this in quotation marks because I don't think it will come to this—lines.

Žujović claimed that the state of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade was no worse than that of other units in the Chief Operational Group, and that it was only through further action that the morale of each brigade could be maintained.<sup>11</sup>

The Central Committee was at this time highly critical of the Provincial Committee for the 'great weakness of the Party organisation in this area [East Bosnia]' and for 'considerable errors of the political and organisational cadres, which have stemmed not just from the lower-level but from the higher leaders'. These errors included 'The failure to carry out the orders or messages of the Supreme Staff delivered via radio *Slobodna Jugoslavija* ('Free Yugoslavia') to all military units in the region of Šekovići-Majevica', which was 'proof of the indecisiveness of the aforementioned comrades regarding the quick and undelayed execution of the orders of the higher bodies. Instead of this, the comrades held a discussion not over how to carry out these orders most successfully, but over whether they should be carried out at all.' Further errors included the failure of the higher-level Bosnian Communists to coordinate activities with each other either horizontally or vertically, so that members of the Provincial Committee worked separately from each other and from the *okrug*-level Party organisations. The latter enjoyed contact, out of all the Provincial Committee members, only with Rodoljub Čolaković, whose activities were not reported to his colleagues. Iso Jovanović, by all accounts an individual of limited intelligence and competence, came in for particular criticism for his poor showing as Provincial Committee secretary.<sup>12</sup> He was soon removed from his post and replaced by the two figures who anyway held the most authority within the Bosnian organisation: Rodoljub Čolaković as political secretary and Avdo Humo as organisational secretary.

Following the Partisan push eastward in the spring of 1943 the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps, with jurisdiction over Bosanska Krajina, was left to its own devices by the Supreme Staff and Provincial Committee. Đuro Pucar-Stari, as political secretary of the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina, responded by falling back on Bosanska Krajina's traditional links with Croatia and wrote to the Central Committee of the KPH requesting to be supplied with a radio transmitter and lamenting the fact that:

this staff is over here, so to speak, without anything. It cannot maintain links either with the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps or with the Supreme Staff, and if it does not receive this transmitter it will remain completely isolated, all by itself, for the courier routes across Central and East Bosnia are unbelievably far and almost impossible.

At the same time, Pucar requested armaments and other supplies.<sup>13</sup> These problems in communication continued to strain relations between the various Partisan staffs. The Provincial Committee in its reports to the Central Committee of 18 August and 14 October 1943 stated that it had no connections with the KPJ



leaderships for either Bosanska Krajina or Hercegovina.<sup>14</sup> The Supreme Staff reprimanded the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps on 18 August 1943, complaining that 'We have several times attempted via the Croatian Staff to establish radio-contact with you. However, you have done nothing actually to achieve this contact. Such indifference on the part of your youthful Staff we could not even have imagined'.<sup>15</sup> In such circumstances, when conditions imposed localisation of command but the KPJ leadership demanded absolute obedience, friction between the staffs was a likely product, particularly when self-willed subordinates were concerned.

Čolaković had once been a possible rival to Tito for the position of Secretary of the KPJ and tension and rivalry lingered between the two. Appointing him political secretary for Bosnia-Hercegovina, Tito nevertheless angrily rebuked Čolaković for what he perceived as his failure to intervene with his East Bosnian Partisans in the Battle of the Neretva. 'That was for me a bitter pill', Čolaković subsequently recalled. In his opinion, he had saved his native north-east Bosnia for the Partisans, he had:

safeguarded that region, strengthened in it our military and political position, secured our links with Srem, from where there constantly arrived new manpower and everything that was needed for the waging of war (food—corn, ham, lard). Only in Semberija could we house all the wounded and convalescing so that they could recover and heal.

To have followed Tito's orders and sent all his Partisans to the Igman region would have meant to have 'stripped Majevisa bare'. In Čolaković's opinion of Tito, 'already at that time, nobody was allowed to say a word in disagreement to him, let alone that he was wrong'.<sup>16</sup> Whereas Tito had wanted to subordinate the East Bosnian Partisans to the strategy of the Supreme Staff, Čolaković had refused to sacrifice, as he saw it, the Partisan position in north-east Bosnia.

The appointment of Čolaković as political and Humo as organisational secretary in July 1943 nevertheless meant that the Bosnian Party organisation was from that point on in the hands of its two most independently minded and ambitious leaders. Čolaković and Humo embodied, respectively, the Serb and Muslim left-wing traditions that came together in the Partisan movement. The Čolaković-Humo leadership of the Provincial Committee very quickly aroused the disfavour of the Central Committee. Following the appointment of Čolaković as political secretary a disagreement occurred between him and Humo over which was the senior KPJ leader in Bosnia-Hercegovina. On 7 July they appealed to the Central Committee for arbitration, claiming that 'up till now in our Provincial Committee there was no such division; rather Iso was Secretary of the Provincial Committee'. Since there were now two secretaries of the Provincial Committee, Čolaković believed that 'the Political Secretary is the most responsible member of our forum' whereas Humo believed that 'the Organisational Secretary is the most responsible figure in the Provincial Committee'. Čolaković assured the Central Committee that 'this discussion has not sprung from some kind of rivalry between me and Kulturni [Humo]' but merely from a disagreement over the theory of Communist Party organisation.<sup>17</sup> The Central Committee replied on 12 July that 'the letter perplexed us greatly, both for its framing of the question in such a way and for the question itself'. It accused them that 'you do not give enough of a guarantee to the Central Committee regarding the correct development of your internal rela-

tions, particularly if you remain for a long period without our daily control'. The Central Committee ruled that although 'the Political Secretary is deemed the most responsible figure in the forum', nevertheless 'this in no way means that the forum as a whole is not responsible to the Central Committee'. As a rebuke the Central Committee decreed that the obedient Đuro Pucar would replace Čolaković as political secretary and the most senior member of the Provincial Committee.<sup>18</sup>

Tension between the Bosnian and Yugoslav leaderships came to a head over the presence of a third party, the Vojvodinian Partisans, on Bosnian Partisan territory. Following the joint victory of the Bosnian and Vojvodinian Partisans over the Chetniks of north-east Bosnia at the Battle of Maleševci in November 1942 the Vojvodinian Partisans had remained in East Bosnia where their strength and autonomy grew. The principal source of manpower for the Vojvodinian Partisans was the region of Srem, or Srijem, which had prior to 1918 been part of the Kingdom of Croatia, and they were initially subordinate to the General Staff of Croatia. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigades were formed in April 1943 in Maje-vica, after which newly recruited Srem Partisans were continuously sent to East Bosnia. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigade was formed in Srem on 2 June and at the end of the month part of it entered East Bosnia accompanied by two members of the Operational Staff for Vojvodina. On 1–2 July at the Muslim village of Plahovići near Kladanj Tito conferred with the Provincial Committee of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Operational Staff of Vojvodina to discuss the situation in East Bosnia and Vojvodina. Consequently, Tito promoted the Operational Staff to the General Staff of Vojvodina and formed the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division made up of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigades. The 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division upon its formation numbered around three thousand fighters.<sup>19</sup> On 3 July Tito transferred the Party organisation and Partisan units of East Srem to the jurisdiction of the General Staff and Provincial Committee for Vojvodina.

There were therefore two organisationally distinct and regionally differentiated Partisan forces in East Bosnia in the summer of 1943, not including the Chief Operational Group. The Bosnian Communists exercised political leadership over the territories under their control, but not over the Vojvodinian Partisans. This appears to have aroused the hostility of certain members of the Provincial Committee who attempted to assert their control over the Vojvodinian units in East Bosnia. Stefan Mitrović, Political Commissar of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division, later complained to the Supreme Staff that 'all the Bosnian comrades' were behaving towards the Vojvodinian Partisans in a manner that was 'contrary to the will of the Supreme Staff and contrary to the will of the General Staff of Vojvodina'. The Provincial Committee had attempted to utilise the Vojvodinians for their own local purposes and withdraw the last remaining Vojvodinian brigade from Srem for use against the Chetniks, 'leaving Srem without a single one of its brigades during the struggle for the harvest and at a time when conditions existed for wide operations in Srem'. The Bosnian leaders were unwilling to return to the Vojvodinian Division the three hundred natives of Srem who were fighting in Bosnian units; when pressed by the Vojvodinians, they offered to return them but without their weapons, which were to remain in Bosnian hands, something that the Vojvodinian Partisans considered unjust.<sup>20</sup> At the rank-and-file level, Bosnian Partisans tended to look upon the Vojvodinians with a hostility fired by regional chauvin-

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ism; the local Bosnian population, it was reported, referred to Vojvodinian units as 'your army' and to Bosnian units as 'our army'.<sup>21</sup> For its part, the Staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division admitted that its forces were guilty of having 'erred in the question of their relations with the Bosnian population' and of having carried out 'unjust confiscations and requisitions' at the latter's expense.<sup>22</sup>

The Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina, for its part, put a somewhat different slant on events: on 14 August, it wrote to the KPJ organisation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division to complain that:

certain actions on the part of some Srem fighters demonstrate that among them are not sufficiently developed the sense of responsibility for each of their actions toward the people: lack of respect for private property; self-authorised actions of individuals in the case of requisitions; cursing, even slapping the civilian population.

The Provincial Committee complained that the 16<sup>th</sup> Division's Party organisation had not made a sufficient effort to change the behaviour of its Partisans. It admitted, however, that the Bosnian Partisans bore a share of the blame: 'There is no doubt that, to the definite alienation between the Bosnian and Srem fighters, our Bosnian comrades have contributed as well; they have, in speaking of the ugly actions of individual natives of Srem, begun to speak of natives of Srem in general.'<sup>23</sup>

The crisis in relations between the Bosnian and Vojvodinian Partisans on the one hand and between the Bosnian and Yugoslav commands on the other exploded over the issue of an attack on the town of Bijeljina, the capital of Semberija and Čolaković's home town. While the Staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division wanted to attack Bijeljina, the Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina—above all Čolaković himself—opposed such an action for fear that it would both provoke German retaliation and alienate Muslim public opinion. Although the Staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division agreed to call off the operation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Vojvodinian Brigade nevertheless went ahead and attacked the town on its own initiative on 9–10 August. This provoked angry recriminations from the Bosnian leaders, with Čolaković accusing the Vojvodinians of attacking the town with the intent to plunder it, and Todor Vujanović accusing them of a 'provocation'.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these complaints, on 12–13 August a second attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Vojvodinian Brigade supported by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Vojvodinian Brigades and the Majevisa Detachment succeeded in taking the town. In liberated Bijeljina a mass rally was held at which Čolaković and others spoke.<sup>25</sup> The Partisan presence in Bijeljina was, however, short-lived, and on 15 August Home Guard forces retook the town. In the second half of August, the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps crossed from Central into East Bosnia and assumed command of all units in the region, both Bosnian and Vojvodinian, but this did not change the relations between the Bosnian Communists and the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division, which remained outside the control of the Provincial Committee and ready to criticise the latter over the conduct of joint operations.<sup>26</sup> The Vojvodinian Partisans took the East Bosnian town of Vlasenica on 11–12 September, but the Staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division remained focused on Srem and sought to withdraw its forces from East Bosnia, something that the Provincial Committee opposed.<sup>27</sup> On 23–24 September the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division and the Majevisa Detachment once again captured Bijeljina.

At this point the Central Committee intervened in the simmering dispute between the Bosnian and Vojvodinian Partisans on the basis of Mitrović's complaint. The Central Committee informed the Bosnian leadership on 24 September that 'the Provincial Committee did not have the right to interfere in operational military questions, because it is the higher staffs who hold authority in this sphere'; consequently, 'the Provincial Committee took an opportunistic and in principle incorrect position on the question of the attack on Bijeljina'. The Central Committee decreed that:

Some members of the Provincial Committee, in particular Comrade Ročko [Čolaković] and Deputy Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps Toša [Vujašinović], made erroneous and damaging statements as to the character of this attack, insulting for our people's army. Consequently, the Central Committee of the KPJ has decided that all members of the Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina who were present be censured with a *caution* and Ročko and Toša with a *severe reprimand*.<sup>28</sup>

The Supreme Staff then wrote to the Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps on 2 October: 'From the reports of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Divisions, we learn that the Provincial Committee of Bosnia is interfering in military-operational questions of the divisions; that it discussed whether or not to attack Bijeljina and so forth.' It ruled that 'the Provincial Committee has no right to interfere in military questions, for that is the business of the higher staffs, above all of the Supreme Staff'. The Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps was told not to 'permit discussion of military questions with local party organisations'. The Supreme Staff ruled furthermore that:

the Staff of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division erred in that it fell into a discussion with the Provincial Committee of Bosnia regarding the attack on Bijeljina, without informing this [Supreme] Staff. For that, the entire Staff [of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division] receives a military reprimand. The 16<sup>th</sup> Division is informed that in future all such errors will be most severely punished. The Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina bears responsibility before its higher forum, as well as for the consequences of that error.<sup>29</sup>

This incident expressed the tension in a military-political organisation that was centralised in principle but decentralised in practice. Čolaković, the principal protagonist on the Bosnian side, was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that it was his home town that was to be attacked by forces outside his control, forces that he considered unreliable. His fears about Vojvodinian indiscipline were perhaps justified, given that the Staff of the 16<sup>th</sup> Vojvodinian Division admitted to the Provincial Committee around this time that 'we still do not have full command over all the units of our Division'.<sup>30</sup> Insofar as other Provincial Committee members supported Čolaković, this may have been an expression of Bosnian Communist solidarity. The 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division was, like all Partisan units, supposed to be wholly subordinate to the centralised system of command headed by the Supreme Staff, but in practice was under the influence of the better known and more immediate Provincial Committee which headed the KPJ organisations in the Bosnian military units.

The Central Committee, for its part, was attempting to exercise control over geographically distant subordinates about whose activities it possessed limited information but whose ambitions and motives it already suspected. In this context,

the Central Committee issued its censure on the basis of Mitrović's complaint. The justice of this was not accepted by Čolaković, who wrote to the Central Committee on 14 August to complain that the Bosnians' side of the story had not been heard. Čolaković said that he alone had opposed the attack on Bijeljina and that it was thus unfair that other members of the Provincial Committee should be censured.<sup>31</sup> On 16 October Vladimir Popović, Political Commissar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (formerly the 1<sup>st</sup>) Bosnian Corps and a Montenegrin with no particular ties to Bosnia, wrote to the Central Committee to voice his opinion that the censure had indeed been overly harsh, that Mitrović had exaggerated the Bosnians' errors and that it was in fact the Vojvodinians who were guilty of indiscipline and self-will.<sup>32</sup> The Central Committee nevertheless upheld its censure of Čolaković and the Provincial Committee at its session of 16–18 October, when it also formally appointed Pucar as secretary of the latter (though he would not take over from Čolaković immediately).<sup>33</sup> However, on the basis of subsequent discussion with the Bosnian Provincial Committee, the Central Committee accepted that Mitrović's accusations had been inaccurate and imposed a lighter degree of censure on both the Provincial Committee and Čolaković, whom it continued to condemn for interference in military affairs and behaviour vis-à-vis Bijeljina.<sup>34</sup> Čolaković responded by accepting that the censure was deserved and pledging that he would 'draw from it all necessary messages'.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile Mitrović recognised the problem of the 'unhealthy manifestations in relations between the natives of the Srem and the Bosnians'. He ordered the Party organisation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division to clamp down fiercely on these manifestations and to 'stress the brotherhood of Srem and Majevica, born from the blood of their sons'.<sup>36</sup>

### *The road to ZAVNOBiH*

A series of factors converged in the autumn of 1943 to cause the Yugoslav and Bosnian Communist leaderships to take the necessary measures to ensure that a Bosnian state would be established as a constituent member of the new Yugoslav federal state. The establishment of an all-Bosnian legislature at the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, followed immediately afterwards by the formal establishment at the Second Session of AVNOJ of the new Yugoslav federal state, including Bosnia-Herzegovina as one of six equal members, represented the flowering of the Bosnian Partisan state-building process. These events occurred in the context of the great successes of the Bosnian NOP in this period, when large numbers of Bosnian Muslims and Croats went over to the revolution, putting wind in the sails of the Bosnian Communist leadership, and events on the international plane, both fortuitous and threatening, prompted the Yugoslav Communists to act. The laying of foundations of Bosnian statehood at this time was therefore the product simultaneously of specifically Bosnian, all-Yugoslav and international developments.

The attitude of the Western Allies towards the Partisans, especially that of the British, changed under the impact of Chetnik collaboration with the Axis, particularly in light of Chetnik participation in the Axis's Fourth Enemy Offensive against the Partisans in the spring of 1943. In September the British sent a military mission under Fitzroy Maclean to Tito's Supreme Staff. This coincided with the

capitulation of Italy and the possibility of a rapid Axis collapse and return of the Yugoslav king and government-in-exile. To pre-empt this danger, Tito resolved to formally establish his projected new Yugoslavia as soon as possible.<sup>37</sup> This accelerated the growth of Bosnia's own Partisan state apparatus, preparing the ground for the establishment of a Bosnian Partisan assembly and eventually a Bosnian state.

The embryonic Bosnian state developed rapidly in the year since Tito's September Regulations of 1942 had permitted the formation of NOOs above the district level. In this period *okrug*-level NOOs were established for Kozara, Podgrmeč and Drvar. An *oblast* NOO for the whole of Bosanska Krajina was elected on 26 September 1943. The Partisan successes of the autumn led to the establishment of *okrug* NOOs for the Chetnik-oriented areas of Central Bosnia in November and for the Ključ and Mrkonjić Grad region at the end of the year. By this time there were twenty-three district-level NOOs in Bosanska Krajina.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the KPJ organisation in the *oblast* comprised nine *okrug* committees plus cells in every Partisan unit falling under the Staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps.<sup>39</sup> In the eastern half of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the state-building process went more slowly. A provisional *oblast* NOO for East Bosnia was formed on 25 October and during the following two months provisional *okrug*-level NOOs were established for Majevisa, Posavina-Trebava, Tuzla, Birač and Romanija, though the first elections for them were only held early in the following year. The number of district NOOs in East Bosnia was also much lower than in Bosanska Krajina—possibly as few as four at this time. In Herzegovina, a provisional *oblast* NOO was appointed at the end of 1943, at which time there were six district NOOs—only one of which was elected—and no *okrug* NOOs at all.<sup>40</sup>

Bosnia-Herzegovina, then, was by the autumn of 1943 the home of a powerful, if uneven, revolutionary movement. It was contributing more Partisans than any other Yugoslav land except Croatia (and for a brief period Slovenia) and, except for Tito's brief incursion into Montenegro that spring, had been the seat of the Partisan leadership since the end of 1941. The equality of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its peoples with other Yugoslavs had been upheld by the Communists since before the war and reaffirmed in the declaration in November 1942 of the First Session of AVNOJ at Bihać. Yet Bosnia-Herzegovina's constitutional status within the embryonic federal Yugoslav order remained unresolved. Communist proclamations in favour of Bosnia-Herzegovina's liberation and self-determination had not specified precisely what this meant. The Communists had not yet recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina as a land with a right to statehood, equal in status to Croatia and Serbia.

In the months following the First Session of AVNOJ the Partisans in other Yugoslav lands took steps to convene 'country' assemblies (that is, assemblies for whole countries) to establish their own legislatures. On 13–14 June 1943 the 'Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia' was convened. In August the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia resolved to convene a 'Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Macedonia'. On 1–2 October, the First Assembly of Delegates of the Slovene Nation gathered to elect a 'National Liberation Council for all Slovenia'. That month, the 'Initial General National Liberation Council for Vojvodina' was convened; it became the 'Provincial National Liberation Council for Vojvodina' the following

month. On 15–16 November, the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Montenegro and Boka was convened, followed on 20 November 1943 by the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of the Sanjak. Serbia was a special case; a National Liberation Council had been convened for Serbia already in 1941 while Tito and the Central Committee were present there, but its membership had been all-Communist and did not therefore fit the pattern of the later national councils. Owing to the tight occupation regimes and the weakness of the Partisan movement in both Macedonia and Serbia, antifascist councils proper were not convened for either country until the summer and autumn of 1944.

The country councils were seen by the Communist leadership as bricks in the construction of the new Yugoslav federal state. In mid October 1943 the Central Committee resolved to establish a National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NKOJ) as an all-Yugoslav executive body with full powers of government. It was intended to comprise representatives of all the Yugoslav lands and peoples, though there were no Macedonian representatives until August 1944. Bosnia-Hercegovina and the Muslims were represented by the ubiquitous Colonel Filipović. The establishment of the NKOJ was followed at the end of the month by the decision to convene a Second Session of AVNOJ to establish such a state formally. In early November the date for this event was set for the 29<sup>th</sup> of the month.

The Communists could not convene the Second Session, however, until they decided upon the basic constitutional principles on which the state would be ordered. This meant resolving the question of Bosnia-Hercegovina's constitutional status. Of the three western Yugoslav lands, Bosnia-Hercegovina was the last where a national council was convened. This was in part due to the presence of the all-Yugoslav Partisan leadership and its organs, which retarded the growth of specifically Bosnian institutions, but it also reflected unresolved questions about Bosnia-Hercegovina's status. The Bosnian Partisans could not convene their own national council until Bosnia-Hercegovina's place was determined. The possibility that Bosnia-Hercegovina would be assigned the status of an autonomous province, subordinate either directly to the Yugoslav federation or even to one of the republics (Serbia or Croatia) had not been ruled out. Bosnia-Hercegovina's status would in turn determine that of its national council and that accorded to it at the Second Session of AVNOJ.

Tito met members of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Hercegovina at Plahovići near Kladanj in East Bosnia at the start of July 1943, following the Battle of the Sutjeska. The First Session of the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia having been convened a couple of weeks previously, Tito enquired of the Bosnian Communist leaders when they planned to convene a similar assembly for Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>41</sup> From this time, at the latest, the leading Bosnian Communists probably assumed that Bosnia-Hercegovina was to receive a place in the new Yugoslavia equal to the five other recognised federal units: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro. This was then used in their negotiations for winning over the Muslim notables, for the establishment of a Bosnian parliament was a traditional Muslim autonomist demand. In his report to the Central Committee on 18 August of his negotiations with Colonel Filipović, Čolaković noted the latter's request for the formation of a provisional



Bosnian government but suggested: 'For now it will be sufficient to establish an Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a political forum in which will enter the representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina regardless of nationality, religion or political loyalty.'<sup>42</sup>

One of the first documents to mention a Bosnian national council suggests a continued ambiguity in the Bosnian Communists' minds regarding the country's status. On 14 September, Čolaković wrote the following on behalf of the Provincial Committee to its delegate in Herzegovina, Uglješa Danilović:

We believe that the situation is ripe for the formation of a Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, of which we have already informed the Central Committee. We deem it necessary to go before the widest section of the masses with our position on the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina's position in a future equal union of the nations of the Slavic south. Within the framework of general democratic demands, there comes the demand for the autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The slogan of a free and reconciled Bosnia-Herzegovina must immediately be popularised, particularly among the Serb masses. The idea of autonomy is close to the Muslim masses, although our conception of autonomy has nothing in common with the Bosnian *begs'* slogan of autonomy.<sup>43</sup>

This passage illustrates the uncertainties in the Bosnian Communist conception of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Čolaković was still writing of 'autonomy' rather than statehood, though membership of the projected Yugoslav federation would have implied something more than autonomy. He was at pains to argue that 'our conception of autonomy has nothing in common with the Bosnian *begs'* slogan of autonomy', something that was obviously untrue, but that a Communist would nevertheless wish to believe. Finally, he was aware that the idea of Bosnian autonomy is 'close to the Muslim masses' but less so to the Serbs, who still comprised the majority of the Bosnian Partisans and their popular base, so that the 'the slogan of a free and reconciled Bosnia-Herzegovina' had to be 'immediately popularised, particularly among the Serb masses'.

Čolaković ended his letter by ordering Danilović to send him a list of Herzegovinian candidates for the projected national council and, in an early example of affirmative action, urged him to 'make sure that among them are some prominent Croats and some women'.<sup>44</sup> Čolaković wrote also to Pucar, *oblast* secretary of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina, ordering him also to send a list of delegates for his *oblast*. The list for East Bosnia was to be prepared directly by the Provincial Committee, which from October was ensconced in newly liberated Tuzla. There during October the leading members of the Provincial Committee, Čolaković and Humo, discussed the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina's constitutional status with various supporters of the NOP from the ranks of the non-Communist Bosnian elites. It is likely that both the Communist and the non-Communist participants in this discussion saw eye-to-eye on the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina's equality with other Yugoslav lands.

### *Republic or autonomous province?*

Tito considered holding the Second Session of AVNOJ in Croatia, abandoning this plan only in October, following unfavourable military reports from the Gen-

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eral Staff for Croatia.<sup>45</sup> Bosnia remained the most secure location. Consequently, the organisation of the Second Session, including the securing of a venue and the transport and security of the delegates, was dependent on the Bosnian Partisan organs of government. As the First Session of the Bosnian Antifascist Council and the Second Session of the Yugoslav Antifascist Council were to take place within a couple of days of each other, in nearby locations and with many of the same delegates attending both, the two conferences had to be coordinated by the Bosnian Partisan authorities. The convening of the two Councils effectively comprised a single process. The Second Session of AVNOJ, at which the new Yugoslavia was to be founded, could not take place until Bosnia-Herzegovina's status was resolved and the Bosnian antifascist council finalised its list of delegates to AVNOJ. Delegates to AVNOJ from other parts of Yugoslavia, already on the road, found themselves held up while the last-minute preparations in Bosnia-Herzegovina were being made. The Croatian and Slovenian delegates travelled via the Bosnian town of Livno, where they were forced to linger for seven or eight days, as guests of the Livno Partisan authorities, awaiting the summons for AVNOJ.<sup>46</sup> As Kata Pejnović, a Croatian delegate to AVNOJ, recalls: 'At Livno, we had to wait several days, because of the session of ZAVNOBiH, which was being held at Mrkonjić Grad.'<sup>47</sup>

Tito informed the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps on 26 October 1943 that 'the Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina should immediately move to Central Bosnia'. He ordered it to take with it Vojislav Kecmanović, the Reverend Sava Savić, Colonel Sulejman Filipović, Mitar Mitrašević 'and several other influential Serbs, Croats and Muslims for the plenum of AVNOJ'.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, on 1 November a delegation left Tuzla comprising Čolaković and Humo; Colonel Filipović; the HSS politicians Aleksandar Preka, Ante Kamenjašević, Bogomir Brajković and Jure Begić; and others, including the former Chetnik leader Vojvoda Pero Đukanović, who had defected to the Partisans following the capitulation of Italy. The delegation arrived in Jajce to meet with the Supreme Staff and the Central Committee, whereupon Čolaković and Humo were presented with a constitutional draft, according to which Bosnia-Herzegovina would have the status of an autonomous province linked directly to the Yugoslav Federal centre. As Humo recalls, 'this draft directly conflicted with our new conception'.<sup>49</sup> There followed a discussion between members of the Provincial Committee and of the Central Committee. Humo and Čolaković, supported by Slovenia's Edvard Kardelj, argued that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be made a full republic within the Federation, while Serbia's Moša Pijade and Sreten Žujović-Crni and Montenegro's Milovan Đilas argued that it should only be made an autonomous province.

The Serbian and Montenegrin Communists reasoned that only nations had the right to republics and that there was no Bosnian nation. They did not believe in the existence of a Muslim nation. By contrast, Humo and Čolaković argued that Bosnia-Herzegovina was a historical land whose three peoples had lived intermingled for centuries and shared many common elements of a unique culture, and whose right to equality with others therefore required a republic of their own. According to Humo:

We emphasised that the complete freedom, sovereignty and equality of our nations, as well as their individual and common socio-political development, could most effectively be

expressed only in a shared but also independent state arrangement of a multinational republican community. And that meant also that the nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina, like the other Yugoslav nations, must found a federal unit or republic that would, like the other national sovereign republics, devolve one part of its sovereign rights to the federation as the common state of all Yugoslav nations and nationalities.<sup>50</sup>

It is unclear from the sources whether a further argument was raised: that Bosnia-Herzegovina had earned the right to its own republic through its massive contribution to the Partisan movement. As Čolaković asks rhetorically in his memoirs:

Why should the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who had borne such heavy material and human sacrifices for the freedom and better future of all, not have the same rights within the common state as the peoples of the other federal units; i.e. their statehood and autonomy in those areas in which all federal units will have them, and the right that what is specific to Bosnian-Herzegovinian conditions be resolved only on the basis of a deep acquaintance with the facts as well as a definite feeling for the relations and conditions in their own federal unit?<sup>51</sup>

Whether stated or not, this justification was in the minds of Čolaković and Humo during the meeting.

In addition to these arguments of principle, there were practical arguments that ultimately convinced the Communist leaders to grant Bosnia-Herzegovina the status of republic. Bosnia-Herzegovina as an autonomous province would have formed, in Humo's words, an 'apple of discord between the Serbs and the Croats', with each competing for its acquisition.<sup>52</sup> The possibility of attaching Bosnia-Herzegovina as an autonomous province either to Serbia or to Croatia was discussed but quickly rejected as one that would add grist to the mill of Great Serbian or Great Croatian chauvinism. The effect on the Muslims would have been, as Čolaković writes, that they would have 'seen in such a solution the danger that they would be forced to become Serbs or Croats. This would enable their reactionary elements to mobilise on the platform of "saving the Muslims"'.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Bosnian statehood was the only solution that could win over the Muslims, trump the anti-Communist Muslim leaders and avoid offending either Serb or Croat national feeling or encouraging Great Serbian or Great Croatian nationalism.

The Bosnian Communists and their Serbian and Montenegrin interlocutors discussed these issues in a measured manner. If the post-war accounts of Humo and Čolaković are to be believed, the debate was not a confrontation but was pursued in a comradely manner, with all concerned wishing to reach agreement in the interests of all. Nevertheless, the divergence of opinion undoubtedly had its roots in the different national backgrounds of those present. Đilas and Pijade remained opposed to the idea of a Muslim nation, whose existence was not recognised by the Yugoslav Communists until 1968, long after Pijade had died and Đilas had broken with Tito's regime. No agreement could be reached in the debate on Bosnia-Herzegovina's status in November 1943. The protagonists thereupon consulted Tito, who decided in favour of the Bosnians, whose arguments chimed with his view on the matter as expressed since the 1930s. This resolved the argument. Humo and Čolaković then travelled to the village of Ribnik to inform the rest of the Bosnian Communist leadership of the outcome of the

discussion. They informed first the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina under Pucar and won its unanimous support. The following day Humo, Čolaković, Pucar, organisational secretary of the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina Osman Karabegović and commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps Slavko Rodić held a meeting in which they resolved to convene the First Session of ZAVNOBiH on 25 November at the town of Mrkonjić Grad.

## *The launch of the First Session of ZAVNOBiH*

Mrkonjić Grad, in the heart of Bosanska Krajina, was not a town in which the Communists had any particular roots. Originally named 'Varcar Vafuk', it was renamed following Yugoslav unification after Petar Mrkonjić, the *nom de guerre*, during the Bosnian uprising of the 1870s, of the future King Petar of Yugoslavia. The town had been without a KPJ organisation at the start of the uprising and was initially a hotbed of pro-Chetnik activity under the influence of its Serb *čaršija*. A Partisan report of September 1942 described the town as an 'Ustasha-Chetnik centre whence is spread poisonous propaganda to the masses in these parts'.<sup>54</sup> At Mrkonjić Grad in September 1941 the young Partisan Mirko Kovachević—half Croat and half Serb and the author of the poem 'Through the forests and mountains of our proud Bosnia'—was killed in battle, allegedly as a result of Chetnik treachery. A year later, while the Central Committee and Supreme Staff were resident in nearby Bihać, the area continued to be a weak spot in the Partisan state, with the Central Committee delegate there reporting that 'in the Mrkonjić Grad district, village and municipal [People's Liberation] councils have been organised, but in 90 per cent of the cases there are Chetnik elements in them'. In this region, few local people joined the Partisans, the KPJ organisation was poor and Chetniks remained active in the rear.<sup>55</sup>

In Mrkonjić Grad, nevertheless, the local Chetnik warlord Uroš Drenović's policy of collaborating with the Ustashas was opposed by a section of Serb opinion, and those favouring resistance also benefited from the moderate regime of the NDH's District Commissioner in Mrkonjić Grad, Marko Jungić, who was critical of the Ustashas and defended Jews and Communists. By the spring of 1942 an influential Communist current was active in Mrkonjić Grad.<sup>56</sup> The Partisans were looked upon favourably by the town's Muslim inhabitants on account of their correct treatment of the civilian population.<sup>57</sup> Although at the end of the year the region's Communists still viewed the town as the 'Chetnik stronghold, not only for our *okrug* but, it could be said, for all Krajina',<sup>58</sup> nevertheless the turning point came following the liberation of the town in August 1943, when the Serb population of Mrkonjić Grad and its surroundings finally began to accept the Partisan movement and give it support.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Ključ-Mrkonjić Grad complained in early November of the way the Partisans were treating the area: 'Comrades from the military units in many cases began from the standpoint that this region is Chetnik, irremediable and can be dealt with only with bayonets, violating in this way the line of our Party and driving into the enemy camp even the people that favour us.'<sup>60</sup> Despite its chequered past, Mrkonjić Grad following its liberation became, for geographical reasons, a strategically secure base for the Partisans and the seat of the First

Session of ZAVNOBiH. It was not until the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH, however, that Kovačević's poem would be sung by the delegates as the Bosnian Partisan hymn.

Once again, the building of the Partisan state at three levels—Bosanska Krajina, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia—ran in tandem. At Mrkonjić Grad on 26 September the Bosanska Krajina Communists organised the election of the *oblast* delegates to AVNOJ, as well as to their own *oblast* NOO, under the presidency of the Banja Luka industrialist Dušan Ivezić. Both sets of delegates were summoned again to the town on 25 November, along with all the members of the *okrug*-level NOOs, certain members of the district-level Councils and other individuals of local prominence whose presence was deemed desirable by the Communists. This somewhat informally defined assembly of Partisan representatives and sympathisers then 'elected' Bosanska Krajina's delegates to ZAVNOBiH.<sup>61</sup> The Communists of course 'guided' the election and determined the outcome, but it is probable that the chosen delegates genuinely represented, if not the popular will of Bosanska Krajina, then at least that part of the *oblast*'s population mobilised behind the Partisans.

Similarly, the all-Bosnian body of delegates that assembled in Mrkonjić Grad on 25 November 1943 for the First Session of ZAVNOBiH did not accurately represent the Bosnian population as a whole, but it was a fair reflection of the part that was mobilised in the NOP. It included both Communists and other individuals of prominence in their respective localities and was intended to present a selection of Bosnians from all walks of public life. No accurate statistics exist as to what proportion was made up of Communists and what proportion of others; the boundary between the two groups was in any case a fluid one. Of the 173 delegates eventually ratified, at least 80 were from Bosanska Krajina, 55 from East Bosnia and 35 from Herzegovina. Approximately 60 per cent were Serbs—equivalent to the Serb share in the Bosnian Partisan movement; 45 delegates were Muslims; at least two were Jews, and there was one representative each of northern Bosnia's Polish and Ukrainian minorities. Only four were women.<sup>62</sup>

However, the opening session was attended by a larger body of 247 provisional delegates, of whom 193 enjoyed voting rights. As well as Partisan commanders, prominent Communists and members of lower NOOs, the delegates included judges, lawyers, teachers, students, professors, merchants, clerks, peasants, workers and others. The representatives of the pre-war political parties included Bogomir Brajković, Jure Begić, Ante Kamenjašević, Jure Mikulić, Aleksandar Preka and Niko Tolo of the HSS; Ismet Bektašević and Sulejman Dizdar of the JMO; Simo Eraković, Milan Guteša, Mujo Hodžić, Andrija Marković and Miloš Škorić of the League of Farmers; Ljubo Peleš of the Democratic Party; and Vojislav Kecmanović and Svetozar Vejnović of the Independent Democratic Party. Former commanders of collaborationist military units included the former Chetnik Vojvoda Pero Đukanović, the former Home Guard Colonel Sulejman Filipović, and the former Domdo commanders Osman Gruhonjić and Omer Gluhić. Other delegates included the Gajret members Hamdija Čemerlić and Muhamed Sudžuka; the Banja Luka industrialist Dušan Ivezić; the priests Krsto Bijeljac, Novak Mastilović and Savo Savić; the *hodjas* Halil Hadžisarajlić, Hadži-Mehmed Mujkić and Omer Maksumić; and the poets Branko Ćopić and Skender Kulenović. The first action of

the assembly, presided over by Ivezić, was to elect an honorary presidency consisting of Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ivan Ribar (President of AVNOJ), Vladimir Nazor (President of the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia) and Josip Vidmar (leader of the Liberation Front of Slovenia). This was followed by the election of a working presidency under Vojislav Kecmanović, two secretaries and a verification committee.<sup>63</sup>

The opening speeches were made by prominent members of the Partisan movement: the Partisan Chief of Staff, Arso Jovanović; the AVNOJ President, Ivan Ribar; the Provincial Committee Secretary, Pucar; representatives of the Bosnian NOP's women's and youth organisations; the Partisan commander of the Command Territory of Mrkonjić Grad and Ključ; and representatives of the NOP from Croatia, Slovenia and Serbia. In his speech Jovanović pointed out that 'all the more important decisions on the operations of our army were brought by our Supreme Commander Comrade Tito on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina', and claimed that 'Bosnia-Herzegovina has shown an example of fighting unity to all the Yugoslav peoples'. Ribar spoke of the subjugation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by successive oppressors, emphasising that:

the politics of the Ottomans, Vienna, [Buda]pest and Berlin, and later the politics of the anti-people regime in the old Yugoslavia, divided and stirred rancour among the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the People's Liberation Army has made of Bosnia-Herzegovina an example of the fighting unity and brotherhood of all our peoples.

Meanwhile the representative of the Serbian Partisans, Vlada Zečević, warned that 'thousands of Serbs have been massacred by the Ustasas, while the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović have shed much innocent Muslim blood'.<sup>64</sup>

## *The speeches and actions of the First Session of ZAVNOBiH*

The First Session of ZAVNOBiH was a showpiece for the Partisans' model of Bosnian patriotism. Its purpose was to present to the Bosnian public an assembly whose political, national and social compositions resembled, at least approximately, those of the Bosnian population as a whole, and which could thus make a plausible claim to represent legitimately the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina that was mobilised in the anti-fascist struggle. The delegates to the assembly were to make speeches supposedly representative of their respective political, national and social constituencies and whose aim was to encourage additional members of these constituencies to join the NOP. At the same time, the speeches aimed to demonstrate the broad and diverse character of the Bosnian Partisan movement.

Čolaković opened the working session of the assembly, proclaiming:

With the exception of several of the larger towns and bases, almost the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina is liberated. The Partisan flag of freedom and brotherhood is flying from our heroic and martyred Krajina to the Drina and from the Sava to the sea. But what is still more beautiful than military victories is that the unity of the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina is arising in the struggle. In ever greater numbers, Muslims and Croats are joining the People's Liberation Army.

Turning to the cause of his country's woes, he claimed, 'Our immediate homeland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, has seen more evil on the part of the fascist occupiers and their minions than any other province of Yugoslavia.' For this he blamed the Ustashes and Chetniks, equating the two movements as Bosnia-Herzegovina's twin oppressors:

In only a few months, tens of thousands of Serbs were killed in Bosnia-Herzegovina in a bestial manner; their homes burned; their churches ruined; everything that is Serb destroyed. These crimes—the physical extermination of the Serbs—were carried out in the name of a 'Croat Bosnia'. On the other hand, the Chetniks, in serving the occupiers, committed countless crimes against the innocent Muslim and Croat inhabitants in the name of a 'Serb Bosnia'. In fact, both the one and the other served and are serving that which is alien, carrying out that which the fascist occupier conceived: the physical extermination of our peoples.

However, 'On the call of the Communist Party, the best sons of Bosnia-Herzegovina rose to arms against the fascist occupier and his Ustasha minions.' It was, he argued, 'The strengthening of armed brotherhood among the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina that is the only pledge for a happy future for the common homeland of Serbs, Croats and Muslims.' He ended his speech with the slogan: 'Long live free and brotherly Bosnia-Herzegovina in brotherly, equal, federal Yugoslavia!'<sup>65</sup>

Čolaković's patriotic opening speech set the tone for other delegates to speak of the experience of the NOP in their respective localities. Hafiz Halil Sarajlić described how the Chetniks had attacked the village of Lišanja near Prnjavor, 'plundering and burning forty Muslim homes and killing all those who did not succeed in escaping'; furthermore how 'three Kraut bombers, at the request of the Chetniks, destroyed a mosque, after which the Krauts gave the excuse that the mosque was supposedly a Partisan base'.<sup>66</sup> Bogomir Brajković of the HSS spoke of how the 'Croats of Tuzla have joined the People's Liberation Struggle to fight actively, like the Croats from Croatia, against the foreign enemy and domestic traitors. They have not rested content only with words, but have immediately gone over to deeds, and founded the 1<sup>st</sup> Croat-Bosnian Brigade, which today in the vicinity of Tuzla is fighting under the Croatian flag against the occupier, for they wish to wash from it the stain with which the Ustasha cut-throats have tried to smear it'.<sup>67</sup> Some of the speakers expressed dissatisfaction at the failure of more Bosnian Croats and Muslims to join the NOP, but attributed this to the hostile influence of former HSS and Muslim autonomist elements.

Osman Karabegović delivered the second major speech of the session, 'The meaning of ZAVNOBiH', expanding on the patriotic themes touched on by Čolaković, and presenting the assembly as the embodiment of the patriotic aspirations of the Bosnian people:

The day in which we assembled from all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina to choose, for the first time freely and without any foreign tutelage, our highest political representative body for Bosnia-Herzegovina—when we gathered from all parts of East Bosnia, Central Bosnia, Krajina and Herzegovina, some from the front, some from the people, to perform our great historical act—this is the greatest and happiest day in the history of all the people of this country.



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Never have the Bosnians and Hercegovinians, never have the Serbs, Croats and Muslims assembled with so pure a heart and so noble an aspiration as today for this great national task. This our council, simply by having been born and organised in the midst of the most difficult yet most glorious war that our people has ever waged for its freedom, based upon the broadest sympathy of the people and the army, is thereby the most democratic and legitimate political representative body that has ever sat in this our Bosnian-Hercegovinian land. It has not been elected by ballot, but it is comprised of the sons of Bosnia-Hercegovina, tested in battle and in much suffering and many trials on behalf of the people and its freedom, therefore the people has given it its unbounded confidence. For that reason, it is the true and most democratic council, unlike all previous assemblies, parliaments and others.<sup>68</sup>

Karabegović then spoke of the bloodshed between Bosnians during World War II as the legacy of Bosnia-Hercegovina's history of oppression by a succession of alien regimes:

We all know that all who ruled Bosnia-Hercegovina—from the Ottomans through Austria to the anti-people regime in Yugoslavia—each inherited from the other all those evil and treacherous means of sowing strife and discord among the Serbs, Croats and Muslims by which they held the Bosnians and Hercegovinians, the Serbs, Muslims and Croats, in chains for centuries and used them as the objects of their political banditry. At one time we were the soldiers of Austrian imperialist policy with fezzes and tassels on our heads: the much celebrated Bosnians and Hercegovinians in the Bosnian-Hercegovinian regiments who left their bones on the Piave and in Galicia. At another time again, we became—in the age of the post-war enrichment and plunder of the insatiable anti-people clique in the land—the voting army of various political tricksters and popular despots, inciting one against another, so that our Bosnia-Hercegovina, through such politics, became the home of fraternal conflict and strife, so that all that, following the occupation of our country, reflected itself in Bosnian-Hercegovinian conditions such that the broadest popular masses of Bosnia-Hercegovina paid bloodily for those days of the past. And this Golgotha through which the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina has passed, the massacres of Serbs by the wild Ustasha from the ranks of the Croats and Muslims and the massive suffering of the Muslims and to an extent the Croats at the hands of the Chetnik criminals, is a reflection of the recent past and the extension of the politics that the occupiers, entering our country, accepted with both hands by organising the Ustasha and Chetnik bands against our people. These politics were inherited by the Krauts and Italians from the twenty-year regime of Great Serbdom and the Croat chauvinists.<sup>69</sup>

Karabegović then spoke further of the interwar 'Great Serbian policy, that was the policy of unheard of tyranny against the people', according to which 'Bosnia was proclaimed by that clique to be Serb, with the intention of inciting the Serb nation against the Croats and Muslims in order to carry out more easily an oppressive policy against the Muslims and Croats'. It was the result of such policies 'that neither Marko nor Mujo nor Ivo could, on account of their internecine quarrels that frequently came to bloodshed', recognise this oppression for what it was and 'see their true path and carry out their national politics; cease to be the blind weapons and tools of various political profiteers'. It was on account of this Great Serbian policy and that of the 'Great Croatian clique' and the 'Muslim *begs* and the Muslim political leadership under Spaho and Džafer Kulenović' that Bosnia-Hercegovina was for twenty years 'neither Serb, nor Croat, nor Muslim'.

It was this policy of divide-and-rule that the German and Italian occupiers had inherited and against which the Communist Party was organising a 'holy war for the liberation of our homeland, and within it of a happy and free Bosnia-Herzegovina'.<sup>70</sup> Thus in fighting the Axis occupiers and its collaborators, the Partisans were fighting the same oppression that Bosnia-Herzegovina had endured in the inter-war Yugoslav kingdom and, before that, under Austria-Hungary; overcoming the age-old disunity imposed by successive foreign oppressors between 'Marko, Mujo and Ivo', that is, between Serb, Muslim and Croat.

In the ideology of the Communists, Bosnia was the 'immediate homeland' and Yugoslavia the 'wider homeland'. Bosnia-Herzegovina was the principal object of patriotic loyalty and inspiration while Yugoslavia was both an ideal and a framework within which Bosnia-Herzegovina could exist. But the Yugoslav context was not viewed in an unambiguously positive light. Karabegović proclaimed that 'Bosnia-Herzegovina is for the first time marching towards a happier future together with fraternal and freedom-loving Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Macedonia'.<sup>71</sup> Serbia and Croatia were therefore, along with the other Yugoslav countries, like brothers to Bosnia-Herzegovina. But Serbia and Croatia were also sources of oppression, for the role of the 'People's Liberation Movement of Bosnia-Herzegovina' was to 'oppose energetically the treacherous cliques from Zagreb and from Belgrade'. Against these cliques, the Bosnian NOP was raising 'the flag of freedom, the flag of the fraternal Serbs, Croats and Muslims'. Thus, while the oppressors came from Croatia and Serbia, the liberation movement was Bosnian in character:

Our People's Liberation Movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina built into the foundations of brotherhood and unity the lives of the most beloved sons of this country: our forgotten Mladen [Stojanović], Slaviša Vajner-Čiča, Zdravko Čelar, Ivan Marković, Pero Čuškić, Slobodan Princip, Kasim Hadžić, Rade Ličina, Fadil Jahić-Španac, Rajko Bosnić, Mahmut Bušatlija and others. Our soldiers died on the battlefields of Bosnia-Herzegovina with, clenched in their hands, the summons to fraternity of our peoples, whom the filthy foreigner had divided. Fighting and giving their precious lives for brotherhood and unity, defending equally the Serbs from the Ustashes and the Muslims and Croats from the Chetniks, our army wins the love of the entire people of Bosnia-Herzegovina; loved alike by every patriot, be he a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim. That is the greatest victory of our movement, that is the greatest honour of our Bosnian-Herzegovinian heroic fighters: the celebration of the fighters who have fallen in the struggle for the brotherhood of our people.<sup>72</sup>

For Karabegović and the Bosnian Partisans, patriotism and liberation therefore meant overcoming the divisions between Serbs, Croats and Muslims imposed by present and past foreign oppressors. Brotherhood and unity was to be between all Bosnians—Serbs, Croats and Muslims alike. In listing fallen Bosnian Partisans, Karabegović did not mention that Mladen Stojanović and Slobodan Princip were Serbs, that Slaviša Vajner-Čiča and Ivan Marković were Croats, or that Fadil Jahić-Španac and Mahmut Bušatlija were Muslims; all were Bosnian martyrs and as such part of the common heritage of all the children of a single land; all rightful objects of the patriotic veneration of all Bosnians and Herzegovinians. Meanwhile, 'our movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina' was 'assisted fraternally by heroic Serbia as by

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Montenegro, Croatia and Lika', but Bosnia-Hercegovina's liberation movement was its own.

The purpose of ZAVNOBiH was to provide a beacon to assist in the mobilisation of the entire Bosnian population in the NOP:

We are still fighting a war with the Germans and with other occupying forces. We must still further ignite the war of all Serbs, Croats and Muslims for the expulsion of the foreigner from our country. Thus our political act: this organisation of a council of Bosnia-Hercegovina to bring about a change in the inclination of the Serb, Croat and Muslim masses. We must precisely, through establishing a Bosnian-Hercegovinian council, and through the unity of the best Serb, Croat and Muslim sons in it, give an example to the entire people of Bosnia-Hercegovina of which road must be followed, if a sooner liberation is desired, if a happier and more fulfilling life for all of us is wanted. We must do our best with might and main and the work of the Council must be turned in that direction, to end the political quarrels and dissension from which this country has suffered for centuries, to break at once with the politics of personal profit-making and to exorcise the spirit of intolerance. In all parts of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the way of fraternisation of the Serb, Muslim and Croat masses must be followed, that through the broadest participation in the struggle of Muslims, Croats and Serbs the foundations are struck of equality for all the sons of Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>73</sup>

It was thus Karabegović's view that the mobilisation of all three Bosnian nationalities in the NOP would mean victory, since this would break down the barriers between them through which foreign oppressors had divided and ruled them for centuries. For this, the Bosnian assembly was necessary.

Following Karabegović's speech and a short discussion the assembly ratified the election of each of the 170 delegates selected by the Communists as councillors. ZAVNOBiH being a figurehead for the NOP, rather than a genuine representative body, the 'election' of each of the 170 was ratified unanimously. Avdo Humo then put before the councillors a list of the names of those of them selected to represent Bosnia-Hercegovina at the Second Session of AVNOJ, each of whose mandates they promptly confirmed. The delegates for AVNOJ were elected on the basis of districts, but not all the districts of Bosnia-Hercegovina were represented; in particular a large part of south-east Bosnia proper and western Hercegovina, where the influence of the Chetniks and Ustasha respectively was predominant, were unrepresented. Finally, the assembly elected a 31-member Presidium. This included a president (Vojislav Kecmanović), first vice-president (Avdo Humo), second vice-president (Aleksandar Preka), third vice-president (Đuro Pucar-Stari) and secretary (Hasan Brkić).

Thus, of the five most senior members of ZAVNOBiH two were Serbs, two were Muslims and one a Croat, while three were Communists and two non-Communists. But while the Communists were clearly the complete masters of the Presidium, as of the Council as a whole, not every Presidium member was a Communist puppet; they included those most likely to impress various constituencies within Bosnia-Hercegovina: Begić, Brajković, Kamenjašević and Tolo of the HSS; Bektašević of the JMO; Čemerlić and Sudžuka of Gajret; Chetnik Vojvoda Đukanović; Home Guard Colonel Filipović; Sarajevo Professor Ante Babić; a Mostar headmaster, Husnija Kurt; the Orthodox Reverend Mastilović; the indus-

trialist Ivezić; and Hodja Hadži-Mehmed Mujkić.<sup>74</sup> The others were Communists or representatives of more humble professions, but the 'notables' were chosen precisely because they enjoyed a degree of independent public standing, and this made some of them into unwilling puppets. Several of the Presidium members subsequently abandoned the NOP. Kamenjašević and Preka left to return to live under the Ustasas; they had, during the Partisan occupation of Tuzla, protected various Ustasha supporters from Partisan retribution and therefore avoided burning their bridges with the Ustasha regime so they could change sides for a second time.<sup>75</sup> Sudžuka was relieved of his duties for pursuing an independent political line and Bektašević was executed for collaboration, though the Communists were slow to abandon their prized former collaborators; the memberships in ZAVNO-BiH of Kamenjašević, Preka and Bektašević were revoked by the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH only in February 1945. Čemerlić fell into disfavour with the Communists after the war's end and Đukanović a couple of years later, following the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. Others may have had disputes with the Communists that have not been recorded in the sources.

Vojislav Kecmanović, the man selected to be formally the highest political leader of Bosnia-Hercegovina, represented the Bosnian political tradition that the Communists most wanted to co-opt. He was a pre-war member of the Independent Democratic Party, the least nationalistic of the primarily Serb parties and one that since 1927 had loyally cooperated with the Croatian national movement against the regime in Belgrade. Predominantly Croatian Serb in composition, but with some Bosnian Serb supporters (particularly in Bosanska Krajina), the Independent Democratic Party had, following the 1939 Sporazum, come out in support of the territorial expansion of the autonomous Croatian Banovina to include western Bosnia as a means of increasing the Serb element in Croatia. The party's credentials as an opponent of Great Serb nationalism were therefore impeccable. Kecmanović himself was a Bosnian patriot in the Serb way. A medical doctor from Banja Luka who lived in Bijeljina before the war, he had been supported by the Communists in the 1938 general elections as a left-leaning candidate, but clashed with them because of his opposition to the Soviet attack on Finland. Following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia he had not immediately joined the underground resistance but had complained to the German authorities about Ustasha behaviour. Unwilling initially to believe Communist propaganda about Chetnik treason, he visited rebel territory in Majevica in 1942 to determine for himself who was to blame for the conflict between the rebel forces.<sup>76</sup> Kecmanović left Bijeljina for Partisan territory at the end of July or the beginning of August 1943. As a prominent and proven opponent of the pre-war regime and of Great Serb nationalism, as well as of the Ustasas, he had propaganda value that was immediately recognised by Čolaković.<sup>77</sup> The earnestness of his Bosnian patriotism is indicated by an entry in his diary in the autumn of 1944, in which he expresses both his sadness and his exaltation at the sight of Muslim Partisan graves, since they restored the reputation of the Muslim people, tarnished by the collaboration of its leaders: 'In this light, in the graves of our Muslims I see enormous importance for our future. The young generation, with its blood and its graves, heals old wounds and at the same time builds new foundations for the better and happier future of the people in Bosnia-Hercegovina.'<sup>78</sup>

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The final act of the Council's First Session was to pass a resolution that stated:

For the first time in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the representatives of the Serb, Muslim and Croat peoples have assembled, linked by firm brotherhood in the uprising, with the goal—on the basis of the result of the armed struggle of the peoples of Yugoslavia and the peoples in Bosnia-Herzegovina—of bringing a political decision that will open the way for our peoples to order their country on the basis of their wishes and interests.

The Council then rejected both the Axis order on the one hand and the pre-war Yugoslav order and the Yugoslav government-in-exile on the other. According to the Council:

The People of Bosnia-Herzegovina reject Nedić, Pavelić and other brazen minions of the occupier. They reject with the same hatred the treacherous clique of Draža Mihailović which, together with the occupiers, has for more than two years waged a struggle against the People's Liberation Army and the People's Liberation Movement. Just as the Ustasha bands are guilty of innumerable crimes against the Serb people and the best sons of the Muslims and Croats, so are the bands of Draža Mihailović guilty of their own crimes against the people, particularly against the Muslims, and against the best sons of the Serb people.

The resolution continued:

The People of Bosnia-Herzegovina do not wish the return of the old conditions also because they had no democratic rights in the former Yugoslavia and because Bosnia-Herzegovina was a province that was oppressed and plundered by the Great Serb rulers with the assistance of the reactionary cliques in the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation and the Croat Peasant Party.

Finally: 'The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina reject every right of the so-called London government [i.e. the Yugoslav government-in-exile] to represent them or to speak in their name.' Consequently: 'The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, because of this, request with justice of England and America that they withdraw every support from the treacherous London exiles and King Petar II.'<sup>79</sup> Ironically for a movement that set such stock on political correctness on the national question, the Communists referred to the USA as 'America' and to the UK as 'England'.

The Resolution of ZAVNOBiH concluded with a declaration of the patriotic unity of the Bosnian people against external and internal efforts to divide them:

The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have for centuries lived together, intermingled with each other and bound by common interests. For centuries the foreigner has brought conflict and hatred. Those politics of hatred and intolerance were continued in the former Yugoslavia by all the anti-people parties. In the flame of the People's Liberation Struggle, all traces of this malign past are erased, and an indestructible brotherhood is forged of the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who will no longer permit that their homeland be the object of struggle between Great Serb, Great Croat and Muslim reaction over the division of power.

Today the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, through their single political representative body—the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina—want their country, which is neither Serb nor Croat nor Muslim but Serb and Croat and Muslim, to be a free and fraternal Bosnia-Herzegovina in which will be guaranteed full equality of all Serbs, Muslims and Croats. The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina will participate on an equal basis with our other peoples in the building of People's Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.<sup>80</sup>

Following the close of the session, a 'Proclamation of ZAVNOBiH' was issued to announce the foundation of the Council to the Bosnian people and to repeat the patriotic declaration:

For the first time in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a liberation movement has appeared that is based upon progressive world forces. The People's Liberation Movement, organised and led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, has united within itself the best sons of Bosnia-Herzegovina, regardless of nationality, religion and political orientation. On its flag it has inscribed the brotherhood of our peoples. It does not simply preach this brotherhood, but realises it in the flame of the armed struggle of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats against the occupiers and their collaborators. This armed brotherhood is the firmest guarantee that Bosnia-Herzegovina will never again be maidservant to foreigners or her children foreign mercenaries. She will be her own; that is, Serb and Muslim and Croat. She will be in the great democratic federal union of peoples of Yugoslavia an equal member with the other countries of Yugoslavia. Nobody will any longer plunder her riches; she will belong to the people, so that through their help will be raised her prosperity and culture.<sup>81</sup>

The Proclamation of ZAVNOBiH was followed in December by a 'Proclamation of the Muslim councillors of ZAVNOBiH to the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. It declared:

the Muslims are today experiencing the greatest suffering and the extermination of entire regions at the hands of the savage Chetnik bands of Draža Mihailović. Across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina, innocent Muslim blood has been spilled, bones scattered and homes burned. This suffering, unprecedented in the history of a people, can only be compared with the woes and extermination of the fraternal Serb people by the Ustasha criminals.

In this way, the Communists sought to create a consciousness among the Muslims and Bosnians generally that the Chetnik genocide of the Muslims and Croats and the Ustasha genocide of the Serbs were two halves of the same walnut; that the Bosnian people were victims of a single act of extermination and the perpetrators were birds of a feather. Berating the Muslims for not joining the Partisans in greater numbers and appealing to them to reject the politics of the Muslim autonomist circles, the proclamation claimed that it was 'the holy and Islamic duty of the Muslims to cleanse from their midst the leprosy and the weeds that sap their strength and that lead them to disgrace and destruction'.<sup>82</sup>

## *Jajce: the Yugoslav Partisan capital*

The town of Jajce holds a special place in Bosnian history as the last capital of the medieval Bosnian kingdom prior to its conquest by the Ottomans. It was there that in 1463 the last Bosnian king, Stjepan Tomašević, surrendered to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. Recaptured for Christendom by the Hungarian-Croatian king, Jajce was conquered for the Ottomans a second time under Suleiman the Magnificent in 1527. Despite the damage it sustained during the war of 1992-95, it remains to this day one of the most beautiful of Bosnian towns, renowned for its magnificent waterfall. That it was selected by the Communists to be the site of the foundation of the new Yugoslav state was not with-

out symbolism for the Bosnians among them. Twenty years after the event, Čolaković, in recalling the Second Session of AVNOJ, recalled also Jajce's long history and the words of the Croatian Renaissance poet Ivan Česmički, a sometime Jajce resident, who wrote a poem about the 'former part of Illyria that is now called Bosnia; A beautiful land, but rich in silver mines'. Čolaković felt sure, however, that despite Jajce's illustrious past, 'of everything that this old town has remembered in its old history, without doubt the most unusual, and for history the most significant, was that which took place in it in the days of November 1943'.<sup>83</sup> He was probably right.

A predominantly Muslim and Croat town surrounded by a rural population that was in large part Serb, Jajce was, as noted, the scene of considerable agitation against the Ustasha regime during the early months of its existence. The NDH never put down strong roots in Jajce and the Communists considered the town's population to be relatively sympathetic. The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Jajce reported in September 1942 that whereas in the territory of the *okrug* as a whole the population was 'generally reserved towards us', nevertheless 'in Jajce and the surrounding villages, the population is mostly inclined toward the People's Liberation Struggle—particularly the Muslims'.<sup>84</sup> The brief Partisan occupation of Jajce in September 1942 involved the execution by the Partisans of at least thirty-six people from the town and surrounding villages, the imprisonment of 300 more and the plunder of various shops and homes. On the other hand the Partisans established a functioning administration, appealed to the civilian population to continue life as normal and released captured Home Guards unharmed.<sup>85</sup> Partisan behaviour at this time, though poor, was therefore not so bad as to produce any great rallying to the Ustasha regime among the Jajce citizenry. The command of the Jajce Gendarme Wing reported on 7 January and again on 8 March 1943 that the attitude of the 'Croatian nation, Catholic and Muslim' towards the NDH was 'on the whole good', but that it was nevertheless 'vacillating', and 'feels that our forces and those of our allies are powerless to destroy totally the rebel-Partisans on the territory of our state'.<sup>86</sup> The staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps reported to the Supreme Staff on 24 February 1943 that in Jajce:

there is a dreadful reign of terror against the population, as well as against the Home Guards; the Home Guards are embittered against the Germans and Ustasas. Among the civilians, there is general hunger, as well as in the army among the Home Guards. In the streets, men, women and children collapse from hunger.<sup>87</sup>

In this context, the Partisans enjoyed the active support of a minority of the Jajce citizenry and on 17 August 1943 a 'council' of Jajce citizens apparently 'invited' the Partisans into the town.<sup>88</sup> The Janj Detachment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division thereupon entered Jajce, though Home Guard forces remained in the town. Around this time, a Home Guard officer from Jajce defected to the Partisans and claimed that if the latter attacked Jajce he would arrange the surrender of the entire garrison.<sup>89</sup> Jajce was liberated on 20 August, with the Partisans receiving the surrender of eighty-six Home Guards.<sup>90</sup> The citizens received the Partisans 'reasonably well', and the latter refrained from plunder.<sup>91</sup> On 22 August the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps reported that the remaining Home Guard forces had surrendered without a struggle and that the Partisans were engaged in organising military and civilian government in the town.<sup>92</sup> On 25 August Tito and the



Supreme Staff entered Jajce along with the Central Committee and the Presidency of AVNOJ.

At the end of August, on the initiative of the Jajce District NOO, a Town NOO was formed for Jajce, followed by the formation of a Municipal NOO for the town and its vicinity. Other Municipal NOOs were formed for other municipalities in the District. At the end of September, elections were held across the Jajce district and a new District NOO of fifty members was elected. These bodies were genuinely multinational in composition, with a strong representation of all three of the principal Bosnian nationalities. It was these NOOs that were charged by the Jajce Okrug NOO with the task of preparing Jajce for the hosting of the Second Session of AVNOJ, and with housing the delegates of ZAVNOBiH who crossed through the town en route to Mrkonjić Grad on 24–25 November and once again following the conference's end. The NOOs also had the task of putting in order and utilising the roads, factories and other economic assets of the town and the surrounding countryside.<sup>93</sup>

On 15 September the NDH air force carried out its worst aerial bombardment of a Partisan-held town during the course of the war, striking the centre of Jajce on market-day and killing forty-two civilians in and around the crowded piazza. As once eye-witness recalls:

It is almost unbelievable, that in the space of a breath such a massacre could be carried out of people who had half a minute earlier been peacefully walking along the piazza and chatting with their friends. Through the clouds of smoke and dust which rose from the ruined houses and gathered above the piazza could be heard the voices of the dying, wailing, lamentation, calls for help. Dumbstruck people rushed down the piazza like mad, while others lay in puddles of blood. Some were expiring while others, heavily wounded, fought for their lives. Those who were at that moment bravest and calmest rushed to help.

Although the slain civilians included Muslims, Croats and Serbs, only Catholic clergy were available on that day to administer rites to the dead.<sup>94</sup> Jajce was repeatedly bombed by the Ustashes over the following weeks.

## *The Second Session of AVNOJ*

The new Yugoslav state was formally established at the Second Session of AVNOJ on 29–30 November 1943. Despite the virtually mythical status this event holds in the Titoist historical narrative, the founding document of the new Yugoslavia is a fairly vague and cursory text. Although the new Yugoslav state was defined as founded 'on the federal principle', the actual form of this federation, as of the state, was not defined and was barely sketched in outline. The Second Session of AVNOJ merely laid the foundation stone of the state that was subsequently to be built. However, the Communists took care, as with previous assemblies of this kind, to ensure that all the different nationalities of Yugoslavia and all the political currents participating in the NOP were represented in the Council as fully as possible in the circumstances. Perhaps still more important, the Communists were careful to ensure that the Council was formed from delegates of all the Yugoslav lands, and that it based its authority upon the existing structure of

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Liberation Councils. Bosnia's role was central in this structure and process. The Communists were concerned to ensure the legitimacy of their new state, in the eyes both of the Yugoslav people and of the Allied powers and they wished to use the event as a further propaganda tool for mobilising the Yugoslav population into the NOP.

The Second Session of AVNOJ opened at the Hall of Culture in Jajce on 29 November 1943 and lasted two days, chaired by Ivan Ribar as President of the Executive Council. As it was to be the founding parliament of the new Yugoslav state, the various Yugoslav lands were represented within it in a manner that corresponded partly to their contribution to the Partisan movement and partly to their importance in Communist eyes. The Communists opted for the satisfyingly round number of 250 delegates, elected by the Country Antifascist Councils of the constituent Yugoslav lands. Of these, 78 were elected from Croatia, 53 from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 53 from Serbia, 42 from Slovenia, 16 from Montenegro and eight from Vojvodina. To this were to be added 42 delegates from Macedonia and 11 from the Sanjak. In practice, a large proportion of the selected delegates were unable to attend, so the preeminence of Croatian and Bosnian delegates at the Second Session was even greater. Of the 142 delegates present at the start of the assembly, 37 were from Croatia, 46 from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 24 from Serbia, 17 from Slovenia, 16 from Montenegro and two from Vojvodina, while Macedonia and the Sanjak were wholly unrepresented. Also present were 67 deputy delegates from Croatia, 43 from Bosnia-Herzegovina, 42 from Slovenia and 11 from Montenegro. Furthermore, the People's Liberation Movement of Serbia had been unable to carry out elections to choose its delegates, given the extent of repression under the German occupation regime, so the Serbian delegates at the Second Session were merely nominated from among the Serbian Partisan units.<sup>95</sup> The Second Session of AVNOJ was primarily a west Yugoslav assembly.

Ribar's opening speech was followed by others on behalf of representatives of the Central Committee of the KPJ, the Supreme Staff, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, the Antifascist Front of Women and the SKOJ. In this way, the Communists gave prominence to the principal bodies of their movement as well as to the projected republics of the new Yugoslavia. Pucar—a former metalworker and native of the Bosansko Grahovo region of south-west Bosnia, recently promoted Provincial Committee Secretary for Bosnia-Herzegovina in place of Čolaković (recently censured by Tito)—delivered the opening speech on behalf of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Pucar, nicknamed *Stari* ('old man'), was an unsophisticated and unambitious individual who was to dominate Bosnian politics for twenty years following World War II. He was no intellectual; his patriotic identification for Bosnia was not the product of any Communist theorising and he expressed this patriotism in his statement at the Second Session of AVNOJ:

Comrades, I cannot express to you here this evening just what an honour it is for me to say that our brave People's Liberation Army has, through its victories, made possible that, on the very territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this second, historical session of AVNOJ is being held. This is, comrades, for Bosnia-Herzegovina a particular honour. For us Bosnians and Herzegovinians, it is a particular honour that we can say that not only the First but also the Second Session of AVNOJ is being held on the territory of Bosnia.

## BOSNIAN ASSEMBLY AND YUGOSLAV FEDERATION

Pucar then placed the Bosnian Partisan struggle in the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina's struggle against an oppression that had lasted centuries:

Comrades and brothers, Bosnia is a country that is most diverse and complicated, a country in which live diverse peoples. In Bosnia live Serbs, Croats and Muslims and various other national minorities. Bosnia is a country which has for centuries been tormented and oppressed, beginning with the Ottoman Empire, followed by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, right up to the Great Serbian hegemony. Bosnia has endured difficult years. Bosnia has likewise endured heavy losses during this uprising. Bosnia is poor, but Bosnia is proud. She is proud, comrades, because she has from the first days of the uprising joined the People's Liberation Struggle, waged in union with the other fraternal peoples.<sup>96</sup>

Following the opening speeches the delegates elected a six-member working presidency that included two non-Communist Bosnians, Vojislav Kecmanović and Sulejman Filipović, followed by a verification committee and council secretaries. The Council then issued formal 'greetings' to the Allied leaders—Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt—that in fact served to notify them formally of the foundation of the new Yugoslav state under Communist leadership. The Council in turn received the greetings of various friendly bodies from both inside and outside Yugoslavia, among which, in addition to the Communist Party of Bulgaria and the All-Slavic Committee in Moscow, was the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH. In this way, the leadership of the Bosnian Partisan parliament sent greetings to the Yugoslav Partisan parliament, despite the fact that Vojislav Kecmanović, the President of the Bosnian parliament, was also a member of the acting presidency of the Yugoslav parliament.<sup>97</sup>

Following the verification of the lists of deputies the assembly listened to speeches by Tito and other senior figures, including Božidar Magovac, head of the pro-Partisan wing of the HSS, and Colonel Filipović, who was greeted with 'wild applause'.<sup>98</sup> Following the speeches:

the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia constitutes itself as the supreme legislative and executive representative body in Yugoslavia, as the supreme representative of the sovereignty of the peoples and state of Yugoslavia, with all the characteristics of a national government, through which the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia will achieve its executive functions.

AVNOJ, in the process, repudiated the Yugoslav government-in-exile and forbade the return to the country of the Yugoslav King. AVNOJ resolved furthermore 'that Yugoslavia be built on a democratic federative principle as a state community of equal nations'.<sup>99</sup>

The declaration that the new Yugoslav state would be organised on a federative basis was made 'on the basis of the right of every nation to self-determination, including the right of secession or unification with other nations, and in accordance with the true wishes of all the nations of Yugoslavia'. The first draft of this declaration had stated that this federal organisation was to guarantee 'the complete equality of the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians'. Such a declaration would have left Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Muslims wholly without recognition in the founding document of the new Yugoslav state. Consequently, during the discussions over this draft, Filipović suggested that this sentence on national equality should be amended so as to read: 'Yugoslavia is to be built on a

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federative basis, which will guarantee the full equality of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins and of the peoples of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina respectively.' This amendment was intended by Filipović to ensure the *de facto* recognition of the place of the Muslims within the new state.<sup>100</sup> In this way, a former colonel in the Croatian quisling army shaped the founding document of the new Yugoslavia.

The Second Session formally declared that the Yugoslav Federation was to be based on the Country Antifascist Councils that had already been organised for the individual Yugoslav countries, which it listed as:

The General People's Liberation Council of Serbia; the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Croatia; the Slovenian People's Liberation Council; the Country Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Montenegro and Boka; the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of the Sanjak; and the provisional organ of the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Macedonia.

The order in which the Councils were listed expressed the Communist sense of the Yugoslav hierarchy, in which Serbia came first, followed by Croatia, then Slovenia, with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia as well as the Sanjak listed in various orders among the lower ranks. Nevertheless, the seven Country Antifascist Councils were declared to be the 'basic organs of people's government among the individual Yugoslav peoples' and to be 'within the framework of such a federal construction of Yugoslavia'. Furthermore, the equality of all except the Sanjak was, as noted above, officially recognised.<sup>101</sup>

The Second Session of AVNOJ could be said to have not only marked the birth of the Yugoslav state but also of the individual Yugoslav republics. Since the new Yugoslavia was defined as a federation, the Yugoslav state and its republics arguably came into being simultaneously, like a body and its limbs.<sup>102</sup> Yet this was not spelt out in the declaration of the Second Session, which was really more a basic statement of principle than a constitutional blueprint:

To realise the principle of the sovereignty of the people of Yugoslavia, for Yugoslavia to represent a true homeland of all its peoples and so that it will never again become the domain of any hegemonic clique, Yugoslavia is being built and will be built on the federative principle, which will guarantee the full equality of the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins, respectively of the peoples of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>103</sup>

What 'federative' meant, and what the precise status of the constituent peoples and lands so listed would be, were not spelled out. The Partisan state remained an embryo whose parts were far from fully formed, and the same could be said for its republics. One of the constitutive elements, the Sanjak, was subsequently dissolved by the Partisans and would not appear in the Yugoslav constitution, while the status of Vojvodina and Kosovo was not yet defined; nor were the inter-republican borders yet demarcated. The individual Country Antifascist Councils had still not constituted themselves as state bodies, something that in Bosnia-Herzegovina's case would occur only the following summer.

Having constituted itself as the supreme legislative and executive body of the new Yugoslav state, AVNOJ then elected a presidency of sixty-three members

headed by Ivan Ribar. The latter was chosen as the figurehead most acceptable to the broadest section of public opinion among all the Yugoslav nations. A Croat who had belonged before the war to the (predominantly Serbian) Democratic Party, Ribar had also been one of the presidents of the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly of 1921. He therefore symbolised continuity with the pre-war Yugoslav state. Members of the Presidency from Bosnia-Herzegovina were Čolaković (as secretary); the Communists Pucar, Karabegović and Vaso Butozan; the Mostar Professor Husnija Kurt; the HSS's Preka; the Independent Democratic Party's Kecmanović; and Sudžuka, former deputy Great Župan. In this way, AVNOJ secured a token representation for the non-Communist currents among all three nationalities of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as for those of other Yugoslav lands.<sup>104</sup>

The assembly elected the NKOJ as the new Yugoslav government and the expression of its executive power. Tito was appointed President of the National Committee, seconded by three vice-presidents, one of whom was Božidar Magovac of the HSS. Filipović received the symbolic post of Commissar of Forestry and Mining, one which, in its pre-war incarnation as Minister of Forestry and Mining, had frequently been held by Bosnians on account of Bosnia-Herzegovina's large timber and mineral resources. The senior Bosnian Communist Todor Vujasinović became Commissar for Economic Renewal. Other commissariats were established at this time for Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Education, the National Economy, Finance, Transport, National Health, Social Politics, Courts, Food and Construction. The National Committee passed decrees to organise all aspects of national life in the Partisan-held territories, all of which were to be enacted via the respective Country Antifascist Councils of the individual Yugoslav lands.

In retrospect, high-ranking Bosnian Partisan officials remember the decisions of ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ of November 1943 as the fulfilment of Bosnian national aspirations. As one delegate to AVNOJ, the Bosnian Serb Mitar Soldat, recalled twenty years later: 'Already at Mrkonjić, at the session of ZAVNOBiH, we saw that in Yugoslavia we would be equal, and be able to organise our life in the way that suited us. Now, at Jajce, that was confirmed.'<sup>105</sup> The Muslim former Partisan commander Hamdija Omanović, a delegate at both assemblies, described the resolution of ZAVNOBiH: 'The age-old dream of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina is realised.'<sup>106</sup> Sveto Vukić, who assisted in the organisation of the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, recalled: 'The age-old aspiration of Serbs, Muslims and Croats—to establish a fraternal Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would be Serb, Croat and Muslim in a fraternal union of all our peoples—was realised.'<sup>107</sup>

This occurred at a time when the Bosnian Partisans appeared to be on the verge of a complete victory, one that was a necessary precondition, from Tito's point of view, for a Partisan attempt to conquer Serbia. Tito wrote to the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps on 6 December:

As you are aware, Bosnia is almost completely liberated, apart from a few towns. We have at our disposal there two Partisan corps and several Partisan detachments outside their framework. Here it is important to stress that the Croat masses, particularly of East Bosnia, are actively joining our struggle. The Muslims are similarly on the move, although more slowly. For the sake of your curiosity, I mention to you that the number of Partisans in Bosnia's units exceeds 35,000 fighters.

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After discussing the successes of the Partisans in Croatia and Slovenia, Tito concluded: 'Because the situation west of the River Drina is favourable to us, we shall gradually transfer our focus to the east, into Serbia.' Tito planned to move his forces into Serbia immediately: 'We intend already before winter to invade there.'<sup>108</sup>

### *Popularising the Bosnian parliament*

The Communists sought to create a consciousness among the Bosnian people of ZAVNOBiH as their 'national' representative body and inculcate a multinational patriotism that would bind them to the Partisans and break the hold of Ustasha and Chetnik chauvinist propaganda. Copies of the Proclamation of ZAVNOBiH were distributed to lower level NOOs for dissemination among the people to publicise the goals of the Partisans. Thus the Oblast NOO for Bosanska Krajina distributed 360 copies of the Proclamation to the Okrug NOO for Kozara, with the instruction: 'Given the meaning of the Proclamation, it must be spread across our entire territory and as much as possible sent to unliberated territory (towns and villages).'<sup>109</sup> The Kozara Okrug NOO replied a week later that the Proclamation 'was distributed throughout our liberated territory and one part sent via our connections to the towns', and that 'Village NOOs have read the Proclamation to the people at its meetings', while 'the members of this Council, while traversing the territory of this Okrug, spoke to the people of the meaning of this proclamation'.<sup>110</sup> The District NOO for Bosansko Grahovo directed the Municipal NOO for Peć in December:

Comrades are to popularise everywhere and in every place, and particularly at conferences, the Country Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina], the National Committee and its meaning, then also the federative organisation of Yugoslavia, and particularly King Petar, who is the centre of reaction and who may be deemed the most guilty for the fratricidal war in our country and for the People's Liberation Struggle.<sup>111</sup>

The Oblast NOO for Bosanska Krajina on 23 December directed all its subordinate NOOs to popularise the resolutions of AVNOJ and ZAVNOBiH among the population, through a campaign involving mass rallies:

For its own sake, it is necessary to explain the meaning of the armed brotherhood of Serbs, Muslims and Croats in opposition to the fratricidal politics that the Krauts and their minions, the Chetniks and Ustashes, seek to impose on our people, and in this way to disunite our peoples in this holy struggle.<sup>112</sup>

The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Drvar reported at the end of December that assemblies had been called for the districts of Drvar, Bosansko Grahovo, Bosanski Petrovac and Bihać for January, in which the people were to be informed of the proceedings of ZAVNOBiH, with the proviso that prior meetings should be organised in the villages for the same purpose, and that it was particularly necessary 'to explain the importance of the armed brotherhood of Serbs, Muslims and Croats'.<sup>113</sup>

The public rallies then held were occasions for Bosnian patriotic celebration. A popular rally on 27 January 1944 sent a message of greeting on behalf of the people of the Sanski Most district to the presidency of AVNOJ:

We particularly warmly greet the resolution on the federative arrangement of the new, free Yugoslavia, because in that arrangement our Bosnia-Hercegovina too will find its true and best road. A country which has given many lives in blood and torment, today in the common struggle for freedom and for the great goal of a better life for all our peoples, goes shoulder to shoulder with the other regions of our homeland.<sup>114</sup>

A popular rally on 6 February sent a greeting on behalf of the people of the Bosanska Krupa and Bosanski Novi district to ZAVNOBiH: 'At its great rally held on 6 February 1944, the people of the district of Bosanska Krupa and Novi greets the true national and truly democratic representative body of our long-suffering, but heroic and celebrated and now a country of brotherhood, Bosnia-Hercegovina.'<sup>115</sup>

## *Enemy responses to the Bosnian Partisan successes*

The Partisan successes of the summer and autumn of 1943, although in part the result of a great growth and strengthening of the movement, were also a short-term product of the Italian collapse and the chaos this created in German, Ustasha and Chetnik ranks alike. A backlash against the Partisans inevitably followed as those enemies found their bearings and resumed the offensive. Yet whereas the Germans saw the Partisan problem primarily in military terms, for the Partisans' domestic enemies the question was how to compete with them politically and appeal to a disgruntled Bosnian constituency. In this period the anti-Communist parties tended increasingly to close ranks and emulate the Partisans by adopting less nationally exclusive politics that better reflected the multinational Bosnian reality.

From the Italian capitulation in September until the end of November the Germans gave priority on the Yugoslav front to reconquering the Dalmatian coast from the Partisans. With this goal attained, they turned their attention to the growing threat of a Partisan invasion from East Bosnia and the Sanjak into Serbia. Tito had by this time assembled the 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian and 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina Divisions in the Sanjak for his long-planned invasion of Serbia. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps, consisting of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Divisions, meanwhile threatened Serbia from the west. The Germans on 10 November recaptured Tuzla; a large proportion of the town's population fled before the German re-entry.<sup>116</sup> On 2 December, the Germans launched Operation Kugelblitz, part of the German operations referred to in Partisan history as the 'Sixth Enemy Offensive'. Involving the 1<sup>st</sup> Mountain, 7<sup>th</sup> SS Prinz Eugen and parts of the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 187<sup>th</sup> Reserve Divisions supported by the 24<sup>th</sup> Bulgarian Division from Serbia and some Sanjak Chetnik forces, Operation *Kugelblitz* aimed to surround and destroy the four Partisan divisions threatening Serbia.

The Germans attacked from Serbia and northern Bosnia, but the Partisans eluded the net and the Germans thereupon launched a second operation, *Schneesturm*, against Partisan forces in the valley of the Krivaja River north of Sarajevo



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and additional operations against the Partisans in northern and western Bosnia, Dalmatia and Croatia. In the course of these operations, the Germans succeeded in reconquering most of East Bosnia and the Sanjak. Many of the newer or less steadfast recruits to the NOP went over—or back over—to the German side as a result of this operation, either because their faith in the NOP's victory was shattered or because they were simply captured by the Germans and forced to accommodate themselves; these included Pandža and Bektašević, as well as large numbers of Muslims and Serbs who had been former legionnaires or Chetniks. Meanwhile, in Bosanska Krajina, in an effort to relieve German and Ustasha pressure on Partisan forces in East Bosnia, the 5<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Corps launched an offensive at the end of December and beginning of January aimed at capturing Banja Luka, the strongest German-Ustasha base in west Bosnia and the headquarters of the Staff of the German 15<sup>th</sup> Corps, but the attack was beaten off.

On the eve of Italy's capitulation in early September 1943, Pavelić had, for his part, taken steps to reorganise the government of the NDH in light of the changed political constellation. The most important change was the appointment of Nikola Mandić as Prime Minister. Mandić, a founder of the Croat National Union under Austria-Hungary and champion of Bosnian autonomy after World War I, was apparently appointed at the suggestion of Vjekoslav Vrančić, a minister in the NDH government, with Bosnian conditions in mind. Vrančić recalled later that, seeing as 'the situation was difficult (again in Bosnia), I considered who would be a suitable person'. Vrančić had:

come to be well acquainted with Dr Mandić, who enjoyed prestige widely among Catholic Croats and among Muslim Croats and among the majority of Serbs, above all because in the A[ustro]-H[ungarian] period he had been a high administrative official in Bosnia-Hercegovina; thus I decided to advise P[avelić] to appoint him President [of the government].

Mandić was also considered to be acceptable to the Germans as a former student in Vienna and Austro-Hungarian official.<sup>117</sup> Yet Mandić, like Džafer Kulenović before him, as the puppet minister of a puppet state, lost all standing among the Bosnian population and became simply a tool of the Poglavnik's personal policy. The politics of the Ustasha regime remained inept and a major handicap for the Germans in their struggle with the Partisans.

With the destruction of Hadžiefendić's Domdo legion and the defection of a large part of it to the NOP in the summer and autumn of 1943, there remained a hard core of local Muslim leaders and their constituents committed to the struggle against the Partisans. These included former Muslim legionnaires as well as Muslim militias that had existed independently since the start of the war. In July the Muslim militia commander Nešad Topčić founded, in the region of Kalesija near Tuzla, the so-called 10th Mountain Group of Bosnian Highlanders, a couple of hundred strong. This group then linked up with other Muslim militias, such as the independent militia of the village of Teočak that had successfully defended itself from the Chetniks and Partisans since 1941, to become the so-called 'Green Forces' ('*Zeleni kadar*')—the 'green' referring to the fact that they were an army of the forests. Although they were formally included within the Home Guard from January 1944, they remained in practice wholly independent in both organisation

and command, their ideology explicitly Islamic and their fezzes adorned with the Islamic crescent rather than the Croatian chequerboard or the Ustasha 'U'. These then assumed the leadership of the Muslim autonomist resistance to the Partisans and Chetniks in north-east Bosnia.

Unlike the Domdo legion, the Green Forces were largely a backwoods militia that resembled its Chetnik opponent rather than an autonomous wing of the NDH armed forces. Out of necessity, they were tolerated by the Ustashes, but scarcely looked upon favourably. According to a UNS report, Topčić 'was in his time a very good Croat nationalist and Ustasha' and 'continues to claim that he is a Croat whose only goal is to *destroy the Chetniks and the Partisans*', but in reality he 'follows the path exclusively of purely Islamic politics and its true realisation in the goal of the *Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Green banner*.' (emphasis in the original).<sup>118</sup> The Ustashes disliked Topčić for his military structure's independence from the NDH armed forces; for his recruitment of Muslim Partisan-deserters; for his purely token loyalty to the Ustasha state; and because he allegedly maintained relations with his Partisan and Chetnik opponents.<sup>119</sup>

As the Partisans grew in strength while the Chetniks declined, it was against the former that Green Force activity was primarily directed. Muslim support for the Green Forces was spurred by the fact that many former Chetniks had joined the Partisans and were continuing to kill and plunder Muslim civilians. On 10 September 1943 the Partisans, with the assistance of local Chetniks, attacked and burned the village of Gračanica near Gacko. According to the report of the Command of the Home Guard Gacko Battalion: 'Gračanica, coiled in smoke and flames, looks like a sea of fire, and stirred fury among the people in the tower.'<sup>120</sup> On 10 October 1943 the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigades attacked Zenica. They burned the railway station, the pit-crane 'Barbara' and the firm 'Željezara', where they destroyed many installations, including the generator that provided electricity to Zenica, Kakanj, Breza and Vareš. Between them, the Partisan attackers and German defenders caused massive damage to the town during the fighting.<sup>121</sup> According to the Staff of the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division, the Partisans 'destroyed the electricity works, all factories, the mine and railway bridge'.<sup>122</sup> Actions such as these dampened Muslim sympathy for the Partisans.

As the brittle and overextended Partisan 'state' in East Bosnia crumbled under the weight of the German counterattack in late 1943 and early 1944, large numbers of Muslims abandoned the Partisans and joined the Green Forces.<sup>123</sup> During the so-called Sixth Enemy Offensive, the Green Forces fought with considerable success against the Partisans, inflicting several defeats upon them. Numbering about 8–10,000 men thanks largely to desertions from the Home Guards and to a lesser extent from the Partisans, the Green Forces represented a major military obstacle to the Partisans in East Bosnia. Yet like the Chetniks, the Green Forces were not a homogeneous mortal enemy, but a disparate coalition of local bands, whose attitude towards the Partisans varied according to circumstances. Thus, for example, in late February or early March 1944 a meeting took place between the Partisans of the Tuzla Detachment and Ibrahim Pjanić's Green Forces from the town of Gračanica and the village of Sokola, aimed at arranging the transfer of the Green Forces into the Partisans. Several citizens of Gračanica acted as mediators. Pjanić agreed to the incorporation of his Green Forces into the People's Libera-

tion Army, but the subsequent downturn in Partisan military fortunes caused him to renege upon the agreement, and he eventually transformed his units into an Ustasha battalion.<sup>124</sup>

Draža Mihailović's Chetnik leadership, for its part, sought to compensate for its weakening military and political position by toning down its aggressively Great Serbian image and attempting to appeal to non-Serbs. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, this meant above all a turn towards the Muslims. This was first prompted by the Chetnik defeats at the hands of the Partisans in the spring of 1943, which threw the Chetniks on the defensive across Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Chetniks recognised that a successful appeal to the Muslims could turn this situation around. Regarding the Muslims, the east-Bosnia-based Chetnik Mountain Staff reported to Mihailović's command: 'If they were to join our organisation, the question of the Communists in East Bosnia would be resolved once and for all to our advantage. This would not be difficult to achieve, but antagonistic tendencies and actions are causing us great disadvantage.' The Bosnian Chetniks were therefore seeking to recruit Muslim Home Guards who wanted to avoid conscription into the Handschar Division. The Mountain Staff was nevertheless aware of the present Chetnik inferiority in Bosnia-Herzegovina in relation to the Partisans; it feared a Partisan capture of Sarajevo and sought military assistance from Serbia to prevent this.<sup>125</sup> Mihailović consequently began to attempt to mobilise the Muslim population in the Chetniks; his propaganda increasingly spoke of the need for 'brotherly love and cooperation' between the Muslims, Serbs and Croats.<sup>126</sup>

In September 1943 Mustafa Mulalić, a former politician of the Yugoslav National Party, established contact with Draža Mihailović. Mulalić was acting on behalf of members of the Belgrade Muslim community who were pro-Chetnik in orientation and who hoped both to prevail upon the Chetniks to halt their persecution of the Muslims and to mobilise the Muslims behind the Chetniks.<sup>127</sup> In July 1943 a meeting of the 'Ravna Gora kernel' comprising prominent Muslim residents of Belgrade, resolved to send Mulalić to join Mihailović's staff so that 'in proximity to him, he can influence the Chetnik commander not to carry out the mass extermination of the Muslim population' in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>128</sup> Mulalić's move also stemmed in part from the activities of Hadžihasanović, who had sought to moderate the Chetnik movement's anti-Muslim agenda and ensure that the Muslims had a foot in each camp.<sup>129</sup> Given the change in Mihailović's view of the Muslim question, Mulalić was quickly accepted into the leadership of the movement, from where he attempted to use personal contacts with other Muslim notables to draw them in too. Through contacts in Tuzla, he attempted to elicit from the Domdo commander Muhamed-aga Hadžiefendić a declaration of loyalty to King Petar II.<sup>130</sup> Mulalić met with the Sarajevo mayor Mustafa Softić at the village of Nahorevo near Sarajevo and sought the Sarajevo Muslim elite's support for the Chetniks.<sup>131</sup> Nothing came of these talks, however, and Softić subsequently edged towards collaboration with the NOP.

The Bosnian question remained deeply divisive for the Chetnik leadership, with the more enlightened or pragmatic elements seeking a solution that would attract all Bosnians and Yugoslavs and the Great Serb ideologues insisting on an exclusively Serb Bosnia. This was demonstrated at the 'Congress of St Sava' of 25–28 January 1944, held with the tacit acquiescence of the German authorities

at the village of Ba, near Ravna Gora in western Serbia. At the congress—the Chetniks' answer to the Second Session of AVNOJ—the Chetniks proclaimed their vision of a future Yugoslavia. St Sava was the Serb patron saint whose saint day was 27 January, and both the name and venue of the congress indicated a different national orientation to that of AVNOJ. Attended by over 300 delegates, it brought together the principal Chetnik commanders and politicians as well as Chetnik supporters from among the pre-war political parties for the first and only time during the war. The Congress represented in political terms a broad spectrum of opinion, for though it expressed allegiance to King Petar II, it was presided over by the Social Democratic Party leader Živko Topalović and the former republican and Black Hand sympathiser Dragiša Vasić. Other participants included the Chetnik ideologue Stevan Moljević, the Independent Democratic Party's Adam Pribičević, and Mulalić as the movement's Muslim representative. All the political currents at the conference agreed to unification in a single 'Yugoslav Democratic National Union'—the Chetnik answer to the Communists' People's Liberation Front. At Ba the Chetnik movement for the first time endorsed a federal organisation for the Yugoslav state.

The Congress was, unlike the Second Session of AVNOJ, distinctly Great Serbian in orientation, despite its Yugoslav veneer:

The Congress considers that the solidarity of future Yugoslavia is conditioned by the creation, in a democratic way, of a Serbian unit in the state as a whole, which on a democratic basis would gather the whole Serbian people on its territory. The same principle ought to be valid for the Croats and the Slovenes.<sup>132</sup>

Thus the projected Yugoslav federation was to consist only of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, the last of which would incorporate the greater part of Yugoslav territory. The Congress of St Sava indeed defined itself as a patriotic Serb response to the allegedly anti-Serb AVNOJ; it resolved that any territorial demarcation between Serbia and Croatia carried out without the presence of representatives of the Serb nation was illegitimate, but did not demand a similar representation of the Croat nation. The Congress's chairman Živko Topalović, although more moderate than other leading participants, denounced the Communists in his keynote speech as allegedly punishing the Serbs for their failure to gain a foothold in Serbia: 'the Communists have, on account of the failure of their crazy policies among the Serbs, proclaimed the Serbs, that most constructive and revolutionary Balkan nation, to be a counter-revolutionary nation that must be destroyed'. He denounced the Communists further for recruiting former Ustashas, for relegating Serbs to positions of unimportance in their movement and for dividing the Serb lands between 'six separate Serb states: Bosnia, Hercegovina, Montenegro, Sanjak, Macedonia and Serbia'.<sup>133</sup>

On the Bosnian question, however, Topalović favoured a moderate solution in the interests of reconciliation among the Serbs and Croats. Topalović had some sympathy for the Muslims, having the previous summer in Belgrade told a Serb nationalist that 'you cannot convince me that, in a free vote, the majority of the Bosnian and Hercegovinian population would declare for the Serbs'. In his opinion:

this Muslim character is not just religious but also political. It is linked to the tradition of Bosnian statehood and to their own position and influence in our common state. The

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centuries-long history of Bosnia-Herzegovina is not the same as that of Serbia or Croatia. That Bosnian history cannot be nullified by a stroke of the bigwigs, any more than could the history of Serbia, Croatia or Slovenia.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina's history, Topalović believed, 'the nobility and free peasantry accepted Islam, but not the Turkish nationality. They did not renounce Bosnian statehood. They fought long for autonomy within the framework of the Turkish state.' Consequently, Topalović argued, there could be no partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina between Serbia and Croatia or any population exchanges: 'Alongside Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia there should exist an equal federated state of Bosnia-Herzegovina', so that 'the demarcation between Serbia and Croatia be therefore reduced to an insignificant amount of territory'. This meant compelling the Bosnian Serbs to renounce any Great Serb, anti-Muslim tendencies: 'if you want to develop a feeling of responsibility among the Serbs for the state, then enable them (instead of causing destruction with the help of the politics of King Aleksandar and of the political parties in Serbia) to be at peace in Bosnia and to participate together with the Croats and Muslims in the administration of Bosnia and the safeguarding of our state as a whole, even of our Serb community'.<sup>134</sup>

Topalović's enlightened view of the Bosnian question inevitably brought him into conflict with the hardliners at the Congress of St Sava, above all with the other principal organisers Vasić and Moljević. The latter was, according to Topalović, essentially a Krajina Serb in orientation: 'He was mostly interested in the Serbs, in Bosnia and within Bosnia in Bosanska Krajina'.<sup>135</sup> Both Vasić and Moljević had been prominent members before the war of the extreme-nationalist Serb Cultural Club, which had attempted to mobilise Bosnian Serbs against inclusion in the autonomous Croatian Banovina and against Bosnian autonomy. They therefore reacted strongly against the proposals of Topalović. As the latter recalls:

The main difficulty was over Bosnia. In my opinion, it would have been advantageous to have said at once: at least four federal units. Against this proposal Vasić and Moljević reacted with determination. Moljević felt personally aggrieved by the raising of the Bosnian question. For him, this entire movement of resistance would have lost its practical purpose if his Bosanska Krajina was not to be an integral part of Serbia.

Moljević's position in the Chetnik movement was much stronger than Topalović's, and the latter was forced to back down over Bosnian autonomy.<sup>136</sup>

The Congress of St Sava therefore upheld the principle that Bosnia-Herzegovina would join the Serbian federal unit in the projected post-war Yugoslavia, with the Muslims enjoying merely religious autonomy. Mulalić thereupon launched a Muslim Chetnik newspaper called *Mašrik* ('The East'), in which he propagandised in favour of the idea that 'all conditions for the renewal and development of Bosnia are to be found within the framework of Serbia'.<sup>137</sup> In the months that followed the Chetnik leadership sought to co-opt the Muslims on this basis. In April 1944 Mihailović issued an appeal to members of the Muslim elite he considered sympathetic: 'With the aim of reaching as soon as possible a most earnest drawing together of Serbs and Muslims'. He assured the Muslims: 'We wish for Islam to be a recognised religion within our renewed state and to be, within the Serb federal unit, an equal state religion.' More ambitiously, he expressed the belief that:

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State policy should aim, in the national interest, that in the city of Sarajevo there develop a great Islamic spiritual centre for the whole of Europe, so that Islam would be represented to Europe with dignity, by our country, and so that the Islamic living space in our country would receive a definite advantage.

He urged the Muslims to 'organise a Muslim national committee with its centre in Sarajevo and branches in Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla, Belgrade, Novi Pazar and Kosovska Mitrovica'. This represented Mihailović's attempt to rival the Partisans by co-opting Muslims' autonomism. But contained in this appeal was a reproach to the Muslim elite, in which he blamed them for the Partisans' continued survival:

You must realise that Communism has found its strongest nest in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for the Muslims have demonstrated a great passivity in the struggle against them. Therefore, there is a great responsibility upon the ulema and the intelligentsia for everything that the Muslim people are suffering due to Communism. If you examine the conditions in the other Yugoslav provinces, you will see that in Slovenia Communism has already been cleansed (there are only 2,500 supporters left there); that it has been cleansed in Istria, Lika and Dalmatia (where there are no longer more than 2,000 supporters all together); that in Serbia it has long since been cleansed; and that Montenegro is definitely clean. If Bosnia-Herzegovina did not accumulate Communist forces, Communism would not represent any danger for us today. Therefore, you will realise from these facts the kind of responsibility you carry, and what Bosnia-Herzegovina bears upon its national conscience.<sup>138</sup>

Mihailović was correct in his appraisal of Bosnia-Herzegovina's importance to the Communists and of the Muslims' responsibility for the latter's survival. Unfortunately for him and his movement, his appeal essentially fell on deaf ears. Mihailović at this point announced the formation of Muslim units within the 'Yugoslav Army in the Homeland'. All this was in vain, for in the struggle between the Partisans and Chetniks for Muslim support, it was the Partisans who came out on top. Furthermore, Mihailović remained unable to impose a unified command structure on the Bosnian Chetniks, who remained a confederation of local bands under self-willed warlords. Mihailović noted in April 1944: 'So far as Bosnia is concerned, it seems to me that the situation is in this respect the worst, for somehow every commander seems to think he can fight and live independently.'<sup>139</sup> Try as it might, the Chetnik Supreme Command could not subsume Bosnia-Herzegovina within its Great Serbian organisation.

The Chetniks and Green Forces tended increasingly to join forces against the Partisans. This represented less an ideological alliance against Communism than an exhaustion of the politics of chauvinism and a desire for a return to normality after the pogroms and destruction of the previous years. On 18 December 1943 the Trebava Chetnik Detachment concluded an agreement with local Green Forces for a joint struggle against the Partisans; the Green Forces put Chetnik cockades on their fezzes.<sup>140</sup> The Sarajevo Chetnik Dejan Kočović recalls the collaboration of Chetniks and Green Forces in south-west Bosnia:

Thus, entire inter-village non-aggression pacts were occasionally formed. For example, if neighbouring Muslim and Serb villages made a pact between them and formed village militias, they always monitored each other's activities, for after all there could not be complete trust. Thus, they sullenly measured and observed each other through field-glasses, but sense and the desire for peace remained strong. Both knew that the war must one day end, but they did not know with whose victory.<sup>141</sup>

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But now it was the Partisans who had replaced the Ustasas as the alien oppressor. During April the Partisans burned several Muslim villages in the Kalesija region in an effort to break the resistance of the Green Forces.<sup>142</sup>

A much more dangerous enemy of the Partisans than either the Green Forces or the Chetniks reared its head in mid February 1944, when the Handschar Division finally returned to the NDH, to the consternation also of the Ustasas, who feared it would incite Muslim autonomist opposition to the regime.<sup>143</sup> The Division received its baptism of fire in actions against the Partisans in Srem, where it massacred hundreds of Serb civilians.<sup>144</sup> Yet the Division, like its Partisan opponents, employed political as well as military tactics, based on its Bosnian and Muslim autonomist ideology. It crossed from Slavonia into East Bosnia at Brčko on 15 March, whereupon its commander Colonel Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig told his troops in an open letter: 'Not only do you [have these weapons given to you by the Führer] in your hands, but above all you have an idea in your hearts—to liberate the homeland'.<sup>145</sup> A leaflet distributed in the Žepče district by the Germans on behalf of the 'SS soldiers of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Division' in April addressed itself to the 'Men and women of Herceg-Bosna!', claiming: 'We have returned to our homeland, to liberate it from terror.' It concluded: 'Our leader Adolf Hitler promised us the best armaments. We have received them. He has made of us soldiers, honourable fighters for the homeland. We defend every inhabitant of the Bosnian homeland. With us arrives a new age. We greet the homeland; we greet all of you!'<sup>146</sup> The Germans apparently attempted to recruit more East Bosnian Muslims into the Handschar Division in this period, 'by telling them that they would be a "Bosnian army" and that they would get their own "Bosnian state"'.<sup>147</sup>

The 21,000-strong Handschar Division greatly outnumbered the Partisans in East Bosnia. The latter at this time consisted of twelve brigades and ten detachments operating within five divisions (the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup>). The brigades averaged around 700 troops while the detachments were much smaller.<sup>148</sup> Following fierce fighting, the SS troops expelled most of the Partisan forces from Majevisa, Semberija and part of Posavina and penetrated into Birač and Romanija, systematically massacring the inhabitants of villages taken from the Partisans. The Handschar Division maintained an alliance with Chetnik warlords such as Radivoje Kerović and did not aim to exterminate or expel the entire Serb population. Rather, the massacres were intended to uproot and destroy the Partisan movement in East Bosnia. But according to one UNS report of this period, the SS troops' brutality against even the non-Serb population of reconquered areas was such that it drove many Muslims to seek refuge back with the Partisans.<sup>149</sup> The Division's operations against the Partisans began on 23 April 1944 and continued throughout the spring. By mid June, Sauberzweig claimed Partisan losses amounted to 4,526 confirmed dead, 3,766 presumed dead and 1,246 prisoners (including six US airmen).<sup>150</sup>

This 'Seventh Enemy Offensive' differed from previous Axis operations. Previously, the German forces aimed merely to surround and destroy the main Partisan forces, capture the principal strongholds and then withdraw the bulk of their forces. This time the German commanders aimed to cleanse the terrain of Partisan forces on a step-by-step and village-by-village basis, leaving behind them a



chain of interconnected garrisons so as to prevent any regeneration of Partisan activity. NOP activists and sympathisers were systematically killed to prevent the restoration of the NOOs that organised the supply of food to the Partisans. In April 1944, Sauberzweig issued 'Guidelines for the liberation of Bosnia', decreeing the conscription of 16–28-year-olds and compulsory labour for those aged 14 and over in order to rebuild devastated East Bosnia. His aim was to turn East Bosnia into a vassal SS state, based upon a predominantly Muslim military force fired with a Muslim- and Bosnian-autonomist ideology.<sup>151</sup> Sauberzweig followed Hadžihasanović in prescribing a Bosnia in which each ethnic-religious community would have its place but each would be religiously and ethnically homogeneous. Thus, 'all means shall be used to build communities of the same faith. Therefore, if a village has an overwhelmingly Orthodox population, the Muslim minority will be moved out to other villages, and vice versa.'<sup>152</sup>

Under Sauberzweig's leadership, the Handschar Division set up what was effectively a quisling Bosnian Muslim state in north-east Bosnia, violating the 'sovereignty' of the NDH and provoking outrage in Zagreb. The NDH administration was suspended and the Division established its own military, civilian and economic administration. Its ruling ideology shared some common ground with the multi-national Bosnian patriotism of the Partisans. Sauberzweig informed his troops:

you all know that, in addition to the Muslims, Catholics and people of the [Serbian Orthodox] faith also call this their home. They must all be absorbed into the Bosnian community... We shall give the first liberated land to the Muslims, but we shall not permit the others to be left out. Please consider this and forget the petty hatreds, which only cause new discord.

Sauberzweig nevertheless lamented that 'the Muslims do not understand that a community composed of all faiths must be constructed, and that all interests particular to each group must be forgotten in the interests of the community'.<sup>153</sup>

Popular support for the Partisans among the Muslims of East Bosnia survived the Partisan defeats in the Sixth Enemy Offensive and remained considerable, subject to the Partisan ability to demonstrate credible military capability.<sup>154</sup> The arrival of the Handschar Division and the launch of the Seventh Enemy Offensive were serious blows to Partisan standing among the Muslims of East Bosnia. Despite the readiness to collaborate with the Partisans, the apparent military strength of the Germans and Ustashes caused the Muslims to doubt the ability of the former to hold the territory, while German and Ustasha terror increasingly directed against the Muslim population made support for the Partisans increasingly dangerous. The spring of 1944 therefore witnessed a section of the East Bosnian population swing back towards the Nazis and Ustashes. The ethnically mixed Srebrenica Detachment initially comprised a single Muslim battalion, drawn from the former members of the Srebrenica Muslim legion, to which was added shortly afterwards a second, mostly Serb, youth battalion. The Muslim battalion of the Srebrenica Detachment was undisciplined and unwilling to fight. According to the recollections of Selimović, the detachment's political commissar, these troops were kept in the detachment not for their military value, but purely to ensure that they and the Muslim population of Srebrenica would not actively cause problems for the Partisans.<sup>155</sup> With the launch of the enemy offensive, the

entire Muslim manpower of the detachment deserted, leaving it a purely Serb unit.<sup>156</sup> In early April 1944 200 Partisans of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade surrendered to the SS Division; they were largely former Muslim militiamen who had been forcibly mobilised into the Partisans, among whom pro-militia agitators successfully agitated in favour of surrender to the SS.<sup>157</sup>



1. Đuro Pucar.



2. Rodoljub Čolaković.



3. Avdo Humo.



4. Osman Karabegović.



5. Uglješa Danilović.



6. Lepa Perović.



7. Hasan Brkić.



8. Vahida Maglajlić.



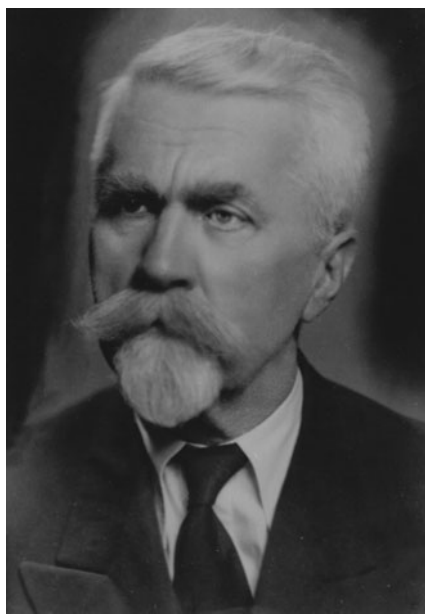
9. Dušanka Kovačević.



10. Zaga Umičević.



11. Olga Marasović.



12. Vojislav Kecmanović.



13. Nuriya Pozderac.



14. Uglješa Danilović (left) and Đuro Pucar at the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH in Sarajevo, April 1945.





15. Pero Đukanović and his sons in liberated Tuzla, October 1943.



16. Đuro Pucar speaking at the First Session of ZAVNOBiH in Mrkonjić Grad, November 1943.



17. Members of the General Staff for Bosnia-Hercegovina, with the delegate of the Central Committee of the KPJ and the Secretary of the Bosnian SKOJ. From left to right: Uglješa Danilović, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, Rato Dugonjić (standing); Časlav Jovanović, Slobodan Princip Seljo (sitting).



18. Representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with Josip Broz Tito (bottom row, centre), at the time of the Second Session of AVNOJ in Jajce, November 1943.



19. Members of the Staff of the Una Operational Group, including Šukrija Bijedić (second from left) and Huska Miljković (third from left), spring 1944.



20. Soldiers of the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division 'Handschar'.





21. Vladimir Perić-Valter.





22. Victims of Vjekoslav Luburić's reign of terror are hanged in Sarajevo, March 1945.



23. Partisans remove the flag of the 'Independent State of Croatia' from the building of the Military-Technical Institute in Sarajevo, April 1945.



24. Sarajevo citizens rally in support of the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH, April 1945.



25. The first government of Federated Bosnia-Herzegovina, elected at the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH, under Rodoljub Čolaković (front row, centre).

## BOSNIAN STATEHOOD AND PARTISAN DIVERSITY

c. NOVEMBER 1943–APRIL 1945

*It is fortunate that women, particularly Turkish women, hide and cover themselves, otherwise the number of sick people one meets would be twice as great.*

Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*<sup>1</sup>

The year 1944 represented, in a sense, the high point of the autonomous Bosnian Partisan movement as it approached its maximum strength while attaining its maximum autonomy from the Yugoslav Partisan centre. In July of that year ZAVNOBiH formally constituted itself as the highest state body in Bosnia-Herzegovina, thereby formally establishing a Bosnian state—something that had not existed since the fall of the medieval Bosnian kingdom to the Ottomans in 1463. This act was carried out on the basis of a rapidly expanding NOP base among the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This expansion was a necessary part of the NOP's transformation from a revolutionary movement into the holder of power across the entire country, yet it involved the incorporation of territories and populations that were increasingly diverse and far from universally friendly. Therefore, paradoxically, as the NOP became stronger during 1944 and ever closer to assuming total power over the whole of Bosnia, so its base became less stable and secure. New or expanded Partisan units contained large numbers of troops who were unreliable or even hostile to the NOP and friendly to its enemies—the Chetniks and Ustashas. New NOOs were in the grip of local families and cliques that pursued their own agendas, often at variance with those of the NOP as a whole. Whole 'liberated' regions of the country were essentially alien territory for the Partisans, forcing them to compromise with hostile individuals and groups in the interests of peace in their rear. The Communists were increasingly dependent upon non-Communist collaborators at the political level and upon former quisling troops—Chetniks, Home Guards and Muslim militiamen—at the military

level. The recruitment and training of reliable Partisan cadres, NOO councillors and KPJ members could not keep pace with the rapid growth of the movement, while the conflicts within the latter multiplied as it increased. Even the NOP's front organisation for women, the 'Antifascist Front of Women', developed 'deviations' of a 'feminist' character that the Communist leadership considered inappropriate. The Communists managed these contradictions as best they could; sometimes they were betrayed by new recruits to the NOP, while on other occasions they purged dissident or unruly elements. The contradictions would ultimately need to be resolved following liberation, after the unifying common fascist enemy had disappeared.

### *Expansion of the People's Liberation Movement*

The Bosnian NOP experienced a notable expansion during the final year and a half of the war. The number of regular Bosnian Partisan brigades rose from ten by the end of 1942 to twenty-three by the end of 1943, thirty-five by the end of 1944, and thirty-nine by the war's end in May 1945. The number of Bosnian Partisan divisions rose from two at the end of 1942 to seven at the end of 1943 and ten in the summer of 1944. The 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian Corps was established in November 1942 as a unit covering the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was divided in May 1943 into the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bosnian Corps (subsequently renamed the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Corps), covering eastern and western Bosnia, respectively, while Herzegovina was covered by the 29<sup>th</sup> Herzegovinian Division, established in November 1943. The General Staff for Bosnia-Herzegovina was dissolved in the spring of 1943, but the Bosnian Partisans remained under the political leadership of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina. In total, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had had a population in 1931 of 2,323,555, was contributing 67,925 Partisans by the end of 1944, excluding those serving in garrisons in the rear.<sup>2</sup> Bosanska Krajina continued to provide the greatest part of these; its 5<sup>th</sup> Corps numbered 30–32,000 at this time, as against nearly 8,000 in East Bosnia's 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps (while thousands more Krajina Partisans served outside of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, directly under the Supreme Staff or the General Staff of Croatia).<sup>3</sup> Approximately 140,000 Bosnians were serving as Partisans by the end of the war in May 1945. Until the second half of 1944, Bosnia-Herzegovina's contribution to the Partisans was larger than that of any other Yugoslav land except for Croatia. Croatia remained the Communist heartland, insofar as there were 26,000 KPJ members in Croatia in January 1945, more than twice as many as in any other Yugoslav land. But Bosnia came second, with 11,765, followed closely by Serbia with 11,750. Bosnia had 5,000 members of SKOJ, as against Serbia's 7,000 and Croatia's 15,000.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion of the Bosnian NOP went hand in hand with a growth in its autonomy and, for a while, in its weight within the Yugoslav NOP as a whole. In the months prior to the liberation of Serbia in the autumn of 1944 the non-Serb and western Yugoslav proportion of the Partisans was greater than it ever had been before or would be again. By early May 1944, according to Tito, 44 per cent of all Partisans in Yugoslavia were Serbs, 30 per cent were Croats, 10 per cent Slovenes, 4 per cent Montenegrins and 2.5 per cent Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the Supreme Staff's permanent departure from Bosnia Herzegovina in mid 1944



restored the structural autonomy of the Bosnian Partisan movement, which was now once again fully distinct within the broader Yugoslav movement. Indeed in this period the Yugoslav Partisan leadership's links with its Bosnian counterpart were less well developed than its links with the Croatians and Slovenes. The Yugoslav Communists would ultimately establish a centralised Yugoslav federation in which Bosnia, like the other republics, would be almost wholly subordinate to the regime in Belgrade, but in 1944 that was still very much in the future; the Yugoslav capital itself was not in Partisan hands until October of that year.

In his propaganda statements during the first half of 1944, Tito continued to appeal strongly to Croat and Muslim opinion, and made much of the collaboration between Hitler and Nedić. In a public radio broadcast of 12 February 1944, he stated: 'In Serbia and Vojvodina, Nedić is carrying out forced mass mobilisation. In Vojvodina, those born between 1919 and 1924 are liable to mobilisation. The Germans have promised Nedić East Bosnia and Montenegro.'<sup>6</sup> In a fuller statement on 1 March, Tito claimed that the Germans 'are graciously offering the traitor Nedić Bosnia and Montenegro for several tens of thousands of Serbian soldiers, who are to replace the Germans in the struggle against the People's Liberation Army. The Muslims in Bosnia they promise autonomy.' However, Tito continued, 'It is not clear to the Muslim reactionaries how their autonomy can be reconciled with the division of Bosnia between Pavelić and Nedić.'<sup>7</sup> On 1 May, in its Mayday proclamation to the 'Peoples of Yugoslavia'—in the plural—the Central Committee of the KPJ came closest to recognising the Muslims as the sixth Yugoslav nation or people, equal to the others:

Peoples of Yugoslavia! Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Muslims! The Second Session of the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia has reached a decision that guarantees all the peoples of Yugoslavia equality and unhindered development in freedom. Defend that greatest achievement of our struggle! Proclaim your unity, that has up till now brought you victory! Mobilise all human and material forces for the decisive battle against the sworn enemy of our people! Only a great and strong new Yugoslavia, that will unify all the territories inhabited by our peoples, can be a true defender of the freedom of each of them. Forward for a free Serbia, a free Croatia, a free Slovenia, a free Macedonia, a free Montenegro and a free Bosnia-Herzegovina in a free Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup>

Communist propaganda therefore counterposed Partisan support for the equality of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Muslims within Yugoslavia on the one hand, and Hitler's alleged support for quisling Serbia's expansionist goals on the other.

Muslim resistance to the Ustasas in this period became ever more widespread. The increase in support for the Partisans among the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina following the capitulation of Italy and the First Session of ZAVNOBiH found military expression on 14 May 1944, when the Bosnian Partisan leadership established its second Muslim Partisan brigade (not counting the newly formed Una Operational Group, which was a Muslim autonomist force under Croatian Partisan leadership); this was the 17<sup>th</sup> Krajina Muslim Brigade, also known as the 'Rama' Brigade after the north Herzegovinian town of Rama (Prozor), where the Muslim population had been sympathetic to the NOP since the early days of the uprising. The 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade was recruited primarily from the



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Muslim population of northern Hercegovina and was notable also for including an entire platoon made up of Uzbeks and Azerbaijanis, former Soviet soldiers captured from the Germans. It also included Serbs, Croats and twenty-seven Italians.<sup>9</sup> Symbolic of the expansion of the NOP to incorporate ever broader layers of the Muslim population was the fact reported by Mile Perković, Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the SKOJ for Bosnia–Hercegovina:

We have the son of Mehmed Spaho, the former minister [and former leader of the JMO], who is now, it seems, a member of SKOJ. Among the Muslim youth and people he enjoys prestige and confidence and we are thinking of accepting him into the Council of the United League of Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia for Bosnia–Hercegovina. However, he is a youth who has brought with him various habits from the old society from the domain in which he grew up, and those need to be carefully removed and cleansed from him. In other words, he needs to be raised as a Communist.<sup>10</sup>

The NOP and the KPJ needed such prominent Muslims, but the Communists were aware that recruiting them could be a double-edged sword.

### *The Yugoslav road to Bosnian statehood*

The establishment of the new Partisan Bosnia–Hercegovina and the establishment of federative Yugoslavia were two processes that were closely linked and ran very much in tandem—as symbolised by the two parallel sessions of ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ, held in the neighbouring towns of Mrkonjić Grad and Jajce, the second immediately after the first. Hence the run-up to the establishment of a Bosnian state by the Bosnian NOP in mid 1944, and the form that this would take, were guided by the actions of the Central Committee of the KPJ as it determined the principles by which the new Yugoslavia would be governed. In the spring of 1944 these were very much in flux. The Yugoslav state established at Jajce was merely an embryo. It was only on 17 February 1944 that AVNOJ and the NKOJ officially adopted a name for the state: ‘Democratic Federative Yugoslavia’. At the same time, they adopted the soon-to-be famous emblem of state: ‘The state emblem of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia consists of five lit torches representing the five united nations, whose red flames unite into a single flame, above which, at the top of the emblem, is a red, five-pointed star. The torches and the flame are framed by yellow sheaves of corn and by a blue stripe with the white title: ‘Democratic Federative Yugoslavia’, in the Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Macedonian languages’.<sup>11</sup> The equality of these four official Yugoslav languages had been recognised a month earlier on 15 January.

During the spring of 1944 the Communist leadership, above all Moša Pijade, vice-president of the Presidency of AVNOJ and member of the Central Committee, worked on drafts of the principles on which the new state would be organised. Pijade envisaged Yugoslavia as a ‘federal democratic state, a democratic federation in which are united the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins, and which is comprised of six democratic federated states: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia–Hercegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro’, while ‘[t]he people in Vojvodina and the Sanjak will have full freedom to decide themselves on their relationship and position in the Federation’. The ‘nations of Yugoslavia,

on the basis of the right of every nation to self-determination, including the right to secession and to unification with other nations' had 'expressed, by their free will, the desire to remain united in a federal state: in Democratic Federative Yugoslavia as their common homeland, recognising their common affairs to be people's defence, foreign policy, economic renewal, transport and the service of information'. At the same time, 'Democratic Federative Yugoslavia defends the sovereignty of all the nations in its composition.'<sup>12</sup> Thus the Communist leadership envisaged, at this stage, a relatively loose federation emphasising the sovereignty of its constituent nations, while Bosnia-Herzegovina's equality with the other members of the Federation was to be safeguarded. Yet the final status of both the Yugoslav Federation and the individual member states would be determined only by the Constituent Assembly, which the Communists were already envisaging by the end of 1943.

The formal establishment of a new Yugoslav state at the Second Session of AVNOJ implied also the establishment of constituent federated states. Nevertheless, this was not formally stated in the decrees of the Second Session, as the members of the federation were not explicitly defined as states or republics. It therefore remained for the individual Country Antifascist Councils to convert themselves from legislative bodies into formal organs of statehood. On 31 March 1944, Pijade drew up a draft invitation on behalf of the Presidency of AVNOJ, which was to call upon the respective Country Antifascist Councils to inform their citizens of their rights and of the rights of their respective lands. Pijade suggested that the following points be stressed by the Councils in their declaration:

1. The definition of the respective countries as free and independent and as having, on the basis of the right of self-determination, voluntarily joined Democratic Federative Yugoslavia as equal federated countries;
2. The binding character of the Declaration of AVNOJ on the character of the People's Government and the laws which AVNOJ decrees on the territories of the federated states, with which the laws of the federated states must be in accordance;
3. The right of the federated states to secede from Democratic Federative Yugoslavia;
4. Insofar as in some federated states there are more than one nation (for example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina there are Serbs, Croats and Muslims and in Croatia there are Croats and Serbs), their equality must be set down...<sup>13</sup>

Pijade's proposal also defined the organs of the federated countries as being the Country Council; the Executive Council of the Country Council; the People's Government of the federated country; and provincial, *oblast*, *okrug*, district, municipal, town and village NOOs. Pijade stated that the Country Councils of the six countries of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro had the right to make such a declaration, while those of Vojvodina and the Sanjak were to enjoy a lower status.

The declaration of Pijade, as one of the most senior Communists and a close ally of Tito, therefore suggests that, at this point, the Central Committee viewed the projected Yugoslavia as formally constituting a voluntary association of six countries, each of which had the formal right to secede from the union; furthermore,

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that the Muslims were seen as a nation equal in status to the Serbs and Croats. However, these fairly radical principles were toned down in the actual declarations made by the Country Antifascist Councils which, although they went far in stressing the sovereignty of their respective countries, did not explicitly recognise their right to secede. Nor were the Muslims formally recognised as a nation.

The tenuousness of the entire Partisan project was brutally illustrated on 25 May 1944, Tito's official birthday, by the event known subsequently as the 'Descent on Drvar'. The Germans came close to decapitating the movement with a surprise airborne and ground attack on the Supreme Staff at the town of Drvar, the accuracy of which was aided by their use of Chetnik guides. Following an artillery bombardment, SS paratroopers spearheaded the attack and fought their way into the town. After several hours of ferocious street-fighting, the Supreme Staff succeeded by a hair's breadth in escaping from Drvar, while the Germans took their revenge on the civilian population of the town. Although the 'Descent on Drvar' narrowly failed in its aim of destroying the Partisan leadership, it was a severe shock to Tito and the leading Communists, coming at a time when they had felt more secure than ever in their Bosnian stronghold and enjoyed the presence of British and American officers at their headquarters. The Allies responded to the German attack with massive aerial support aimed at relieving pressure on the Partisans, while a shaken Tito asked the British to evacuate him from Yugoslavia. At the start of June Tito was transported to Bari in Italy in an Allied plane and thence, in a British destroyer, to the Croatian island of Vis, which was held by the Allies and the Partisans. Thus came to an end Tito's long stay in Bosnia-Herzegovina that had lasted two and a half years, except for his abortive excursion into Montenegro in the spring of 1943. The completion of the Bosnian state-building revolution would therefore take place without the direct presence and supervision of the Yugoslav Partisan leadership.

Meanwhile, the British added the diplomatic icing to the cake of the Yugoslav Revolution. On Churchill's prompting, the Royal Yugoslav government-in-exile under Ivan Šubašić and the NKOJ under Tito signed an agreement on 16 June, whereby the Royal government recognised the People's Liberation Army and AVNOJ and committed itself to supporting their struggle, while the NKOJ pledged to defer the question of Yugoslavia's final constitutional order until the end of the war.<sup>14</sup> The Tito-Šubašić Agreement was a product not simply of British machinations but also of the long-term struggle of the non-Serbian peoples of Yugoslavia to free themselves from the Serbian hegemony that reigned in the inter-war period. There were no Serbs from Serbia in Šubašić's government; Šubašić himself was a Croat politician of the HSS; and the Agreement consequently came under attack from Nedić, Mihailović and Serbian politicians-in-exile for its allegedly non-Serb or anti-Serb character. So glaring was the Serbian hostility that in their meeting of 12 August, Churchill expressed his hope to Tito for a 'reconciliation between the Serbian people and the People's Liberation Movement'.<sup>15</sup> The Chetniks, for their part, denounced the Agreement as the product of an 'anti-Serb coalition of Croat and Communist elements'.<sup>16</sup> In reality Šubašić sought to bring Chetnik and other non-Communist Serb elements into his coalition to counterbalance the Communists, yet there is no doubt that the Agreement marked a defeat for traditional Serbian national politics, hence a tri-

umph for the national aspirations of Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins and, to all intents and purposes, for the Bosnians as well.

*The Second Session of ZAVNOBiH*

The Communist leadership decided, on the eve of the Second Session of AVNOJ, that Bosnia-Hercegovina would be a republic equal to the other five projected republics of the Yugoslav Federation, and Bosnia's equality with these five other countries was formally recognised at the Second Session, when the federal state was formally established. Yet the Bosnian state itself had still not been formally set up; nor was the existence of the republics explicitly proclaimed at the Second Session. It was therefore left to the individual Country Antifascist Councils to establish the statehood of their respective countries as the constituent members of the embryonic federation. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH consequently resolved on 9 May 1944 that, for this purpose, the second session of the assembly would be held on 30 June. This followed soon after a decision by the Presidency, in its session of 24–25 April 1944, on the equality of languages: 'Given the national composition of Bosnia-Hercegovina, it is necessary to realise the equality of the Serbian and Croatian languages and the equality of their scripts [Latin and Cyrillic]. The Polish, Ukrainian and Czech national minorities will be granted full freedom of use of their mother tongues.'<sup>17</sup> The adoption of a policy on the national language was a necessary part of the state-building process.

The Bosnian Communists convened the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH on 30 June 1944, with the town of Sanski Most selected as the venue. Although the population of the district had long been hostile to the NOP and supportive of either the Ustashes or the Chetniks, by early 1944 this had begun to change, and the Okrug NOO for Podgrmeč reported in February that 'a considerable number of Muslims and Catholics had joined the ranks of the P[eople's] L[iberation] Army...'<sup>18</sup> The Partisans built up a strong basis of support among the town's population; when they liberated Sanski Most in October they numbered among their close collaborators the Ustashes' own District Superintendent Marko Jungić as well as a gendarme lieutenant, Ivan Babić.<sup>19</sup> In April 1944 the UNS listed the Partisans' principal collaborators in the town, in addition to Jungić and Babić, as including Rasim Hromalić, the municipal mayor; Mujhudin Hamidović, a sharia law judge; and Vladimir Majhrovski, the municipal treasurer.<sup>20</sup>

The Second Session opened with the singing of the Bosnian Partisan anthem, 'Through the forests and mountains of our proud Bosnia', composed by the young half-Serb, half-Croat Bosnian Partisan Mirko Kovačević, killed fighting at Mrkonjić Grad in 1941. Vojislav Kecmanović presided over the assembly, with Sulejman Filipović as deputy president. The delegates were broadly those who had attended the First Session (though for unknown reasons five of those failed to attend the Second Session) and an additional twenty-five elected during the course of this session, though their names were not recorded on the stenographic record. Of the 165 delegates whose names were recorded, 77 were from Bosanska Krajina, 53 from East Bosnia and 35 from Hercegovina. However, the stenographic record does not appear to be entirely accurate: one delegate, Miloš Zekić, was listed twice; the second time, the name of his military unit was given incor-

rectly. The editors of the published edition of the record note that another delegate, Džemal Mahmutćehajić, was present but not listed on the record. Furthermore, an archival source suggests that an additional six delegates were present but not listed. This gives a figure of 197 delegates. The editors of the published edition of the record conclude that the exact number of delegates cannot be accurately determined and so these figures must be taken as approximations only. Furthermore, perhaps a third of the delegates were either wholly absent or in attendance by proxy.<sup>21</sup>

The first actions carried out by the assembly were the sending of honorary greetings to AVNOJ and to Tito as President of the NKOJ. In turn, an honorary greeting from the Presidency of AVNOJ was read out to the assembly, in which the latter sent 'the first people's representative body of Bosnia-Hercegovina our warmest greetings'; in the People's Liberation Struggle, 'to Bosnia-Hercegovina fell the role of the principal link between all the lands of Yugoslavia; the field of our most important battles; the ground on which our People's Liberation Army grew to its present power; in which, at Bihać and Jajce, the foundations of the D[emocratic] F[ederal] R[epublic] were laid'. This was followed by a minute's silence in memory of the NOP dead. The first speech was then made by Nikola Rupčić, a representative of the Croatian antifascist council, who proclaimed the revolutionary brotherhood of the two core Partisan lands: 'Never in its history has Croatia been so firmly linked with Bosnia-Hercegovina as in this patriotic war... A common destiny in the enslaved homeland has brought together, through the heroic struggle of the patriotic war, the peoples of Croatia and the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina.'<sup>22</sup>

The assembly then accepted into its ranks twenty-three new members, to which two more were added on the second day of the session. The new members represented a combination of Communists and non-Communists and included two HSS politicians from Livno, Florijan Sučić and Jakov Grgurić; a Tuzla mine-owner, Muratbeg Zaimović; Imam Sulejman Topić (subsequently executed by the Partisans as an Ustasha collaborator); and Major Halil Šakanović, commander of the Una Operational Group. Only seven of the delegates were women. This was followed by the election of a Presidency of the Session, comprising Vojislav Kecmanović, Đuro Pucar, Avdo Humo, Jakov Grgurić, Novak Mastilović, Sulejman Filipović, Todor Vujasinović, Rodoljub Čolaković, Hasan Brkić, Boško Hadžić and Dušan Grk. The composition of this Presidency was intended to represent both Communists and non-Communists, including as it did a Serb politician of the Independent Democratic Party; a Croat politician of the HSS; a Serb Orthodox priest; and a Muslim former Home Guard colonel. There were no female members, however. Finally, the opening technical stage of the session ended with the adoption of a set of rules governing the working of ZAVNOBiH and the rights of its delegates; the body was to be convened regularly twice a year, and additionally in case of extraordinary circumstances. In this way, ZAVNOBiH took another step towards establishing itself as a regular institution of state.

Pucar gave the first of two keynote speeches, entitled 'The meaning of the decision of the Second Session of AVNOJ for the further development of the People's Liberation Struggle of Bosnia-Hercegovina.' After speaking in general terms of the successes of the NOP, Pucar spoke of what the Second Session of

AVNOJ's relevance was for Bosnia-Herzegovina: 'The decisions have opened a new, bright page in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina has become an equal federal unit.' He argued that the implications of this were making themselves felt on the consciousness of the Bosnian people, awakening them to the new rights that Bosnia-Herzegovina would enjoy. Pucar stressed the fact that by giving Bosnia-Herzegovina full membership of the Yugoslav federation, the NOP was able to attract segments of the population that had hitherto remained aloof: 'It is indisputable, that the going over of the Cazinska Krajina Muslims to the People's Liberation Struggle, besides other factors, was greatly influenced by the decision on the future position of Bosnia-Herzegovina within Yugoslavia.' Pucar stressed the mass influx of Muslims into the NOP, the emergence of a pro-NOP current among the Croats and the forming of a pro-NOP network among prominent Bosnian citizens in the towns as being particularly important recent achievements.<sup>23</sup>

Pucar emphasised that Bosnia-Herzegovina's participation in the Yugoslav Partisan state-building project was occurring on the basis of its right to self-determination, and that this implied a changing role for ZAVNOBiH, 'because, on the basis of the right to self-determination, Bosnia-Herzegovina has become a federal unit. The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have entered voluntarily—on the basis of their sovereign will, together with the people of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro—into the federal Yugoslav state union'. Consequently:

The Country Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina must transform itself, from a general political representation into a state organ; it must transform itself into a parliament, into the highest legislative and executive government of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On this basis, our People's Liberation Councils, as organs of ZAVNOBiH, will become organs of state government, and as such, the carriers of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood.

In this manner, Pucar argued, the Bosnian people were, for the first time, achieving their traditional goal of self-determination through their struggle in the NOP:

The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina aspired, too, since earlier times for freedom and democracy. These aspirations could not be achieved in the former Yugoslavia, in which Bosnia-Herzegovina was a semi-colony, and, as such, oppressed by the Great Serbian regime and by other reactionaries. But in the unequal and heroic struggle against the occupiers and domestic traitors, in union with the other peoples of Yugoslavia, our people has achieved and guaranteed for itself the right to self-determination. On the basis of this right, stemming from the fire of armed struggle and the democratic will of our people, today we are establishing the state union of federative Yugoslavia, in which federated Bosnia-Herzegovina is being built.<sup>24</sup>

Pucar expressed a peculiarly Bosnian Serb and Communist vision of Bosnian national-liberation. His conception of Bosnian statehood rejected any sense of continuity with medieval Bosnia, which had been a Catholic monarchy and existed prior to the appearance of the nationally conscious Bosnian Serb community that was a product of the Ottoman era:

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The idea of Bosnian statehood is young. It has arisen in the course of the uprising. We had before in our history the state of the Bosnian *bans* [viceroys]. But that was not a people's state, but a state of feudal lords in which the enserfed Christian subjects toiled for the benefit of a handful of Bosnian magnates.

He pointed out: 'Earlier liberation struggles of the Serb people in Bosnia-Hercegovina against the occupiers had always had, as their goal, unification with the free Serbian people in Serbia'; consequently, '[i]n its struggle, the Serb people always sought a bulwark in the Serb people in Serbia'. Pucar lamented the prior failure of the Muslims and Croats to join the Serb people in these struggles: 'Its struggle could never base itself on the help of its brothers in Bosnia who, thanks to their privileged social and economic position—as was the case with the Muslims or with the special policy of the occupiers toward the Croats—stood apart from the struggle.' In this manner, Pucar appropriated for the Serbs alone the Bosnian revolutionary heritage, ignoring the history of Muslim and Croat resistance to the Ottomans, of Croat participation in the predominantly Serb uprising of 1875–78, and of Muslim leadership of the resistance to the Austro-Hungarian invasion of 1878.

Bosnian Serb nationalism had traditionally striven to unite the Muslims and Croats around the Serb core and establish Bosnia-Hercegovina as a separate, multi-religious Serb state in its own right, closely linked to, but autonomous from, Serbia and Montenegro. The Orthodox Serb community was thus to play the role of the Piedmontese of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Pucar, in his speech, stood in this tradition:

Thanks to historical and political circumstances, the Serb people, which was the most threatened, found within itself enough living strength to wage the struggle against the occupier. Led by democratic forces, it developed a democratic spirit in its struggle; thus it could introduce the idea of brotherhood among the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina. To it belongs the honour and glory of introducing the idea of brotherhood among the Muslims and among the Croats.<sup>25</sup>

This somewhat distorted the historical record: it had been the multinational Bosnian Communist organisation, in which Serbs had played a disproportionate but far from exclusive role, that had 'introduced the idea of brotherhood' to a Partisan rank and file that, as well as being initially overwhelmingly Serb, was also largely sectarian and chauvinist in its view of Muslims and Croats. The 'idea of brotherhood' was, meanwhile, spread among Muslims and Croats in the towns by the underground NOP, and among Muslim and Croat Partisans by political commissars from the ranks of the KPJ.

Pucar therefore appropriated the credit for 'introducing the idea of brotherhood' from the multinational KPJ and NOP to the 'Serb people'—an indication of his consciousness as a Serb and Communist. He was no chauvinist but an uneducated metalworker; he instinctively interpreted the Communists' achievement as part of the Bosnian Serb revolutionary tradition. He nevertheless expressed the evolution of the Communist wing of this tradition away from Serb nationalism and an exclusively Serb conception of Bosnia-Hercegovina:

For the first time in its history, Bosnia-Hercegovina is today beginning to achieve the solidarity of Serbs, Croats and Muslims within itself, on the basis of the firm conviction that



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only through their joint strength in the revolutionary struggle for brotherhood can Bosnia-Herzegovina be liberated, and in this way can be destroyed all the reactionary forces that have made of her a land of mutual enmity and hatred.

This sense of Bosnia-Herzegovina's national pluralism also implied a recognition of the Muslims as a nationality in their own right: 'In these conditions [of Bosnia-Herzegovina's equal membership of the Yugoslav federation], the Muslims will be completely equal and will enjoy all rights, just as will the Serb and Croat peoples.'

Pucar was, however, aware that the successful realisation of the brotherhood of Bosnia-Herzegovina's peoples depended upon a greater participation of Muslims and Croats as well as Serbs within it. Since 'the Muslims, on account of their historical-social position and their political upbringing at the time of the old Yugoslavia, have definitely developed their particularities, that have consolidated among them to an unbelievable extent their sense of the particularity of the Muslims as a whole', and since the Muslims 'do not see in the People's Liberation Movement a guarantee that their equality with the other peoples will be secured', so it was necessary for the NOP to provide some expression, within its own organisational structure, of this Muslim sense of separateness. Pucar, therefore, recognised 'the imperative need, that within the framework of the People's Liberation Front of Bosnia-Herzegovina be formed some sort of Muslim political council, that would have authority among the Muslims and that would, as such, be able to influence a greater influx of Muslims into our ranks'. Such a Muslim body would eventually be set up after the end of the war. Similarly, Pucar argued that the NOP would have to respect Bosnian Croat particularity:

Through Croat, as through Muslim particularity, and through their political [pro-NOP] leaderships, which will remove the influence of reaction from the people, it is necessary to bring the whole of this backward mass close together with the all-people and all-democratic united movement of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>26</sup>

The Bosnian Serb revolutionary tradition that Pucar sprang from, therefore, had, in his person and those of his fellow Serb Communists, evolved into a recognition that Bosnian national-liberation could not succeed without due recognition of the nationally distinct character of both the Muslims and the Croats.

Hasan Brkić, Secretary of ZAVNOBiH, delivered the second keynote speech, entitled 'Constructing Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood within the framework of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.' As a Muslim law student from Livno who chose to identify himself in the post-war years as a Croat rather than as a Serb, Brkić was a Communist of a very different background from Pucar's, one whose presentation of the Bosnian liberation struggle was less colourful and more legalistic. According to Brkić: 'The decisions of the Second Session [of AVNOJ] represent a turning point in the development too of our People's Liberation Struggle, because Bosnia-Herzegovina has, for the first time, become an equal participant in the construction both of our Yugoslav statehood, and of our own particular Bosnian statehood.' The establishment of the new Yugoslav federal state at the Second Session, a decision in which the representatives of Bosnia-Herzegovina participated, represented also the start of the process of constructing the Bosnian state: 'Through this decision, the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have

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begun, without anyone's tutorship, to construct their statehood; to establish the organs of their state government, from the lowest up to the Bosnian parliament and government.'

Whereas Pucar stressed the common struggle of the Bosnian peoples, with ZAVNOBiH as both expression and catalyst of this struggle, Brkić stressed the role of ZAVNOBiH as the institutional foundation-stone of Bosnian statehood and sovereignty:

The parliaments of the Yugoslav peoples, as the carriers of national sovereignty and supreme authority, differ significantly from most other parliaments. Our parliament in itself combines the executive and legislative functions of government, in contrast to other parliaments in which one authority is separated from the other... The unification of the legislative and executive functions of our government represents the highest form of democracy.

According to Brkić, therefore, while it was the decision of the all-Yugoslav AVNOJ that provided the foundation-stone upon which Bosnian statehood was being built, it was the individual parliaments of the different Yugoslav lands that were the 'carriers of national sovereignty and supreme authority'. Brkić continued: 'It is our duty to develop this first Bosnian-Herzegovinian parliament as much as possible, so that it will work that much better at constructing our statehood.'<sup>27</sup> Thus, it was necessary to lay down the functions of the future Bosnian government, which was to be formed at the appropriate moment, and to continue to strengthen the NOOs. The Session should adopt a declaration of the rights of citizens, and approve the establishment of commissions to try war criminals and regulate the role of religion in society so that the authors and sources of sectarian hatred among Bosnians could be removed. Bosnia-Herzegovina's statehood would rest squarely on its own foundations, distinct from those of Yugoslavia as a whole.

The keynote speeches were followed by the speeches of individual delegates who were intended by the Communists to embody the diversity of the Bosnian NOP. Florijan Sučić, president of the Okrug NOO for Livno and a former HSS politician, spoke of the large-scale participation of Croats and Muslims from his region in the NOP; he addressed the Assembly as the 'Bosnian parliament', using the traditional Croatian term *sabor* for parliament. His fellow HSS member, Bogomir Brajković from Tuzla, upheld the HSS tradition that had found expression in the NOP, lamenting the fact that 'the Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina were not participating in the People's Liberation Movement at anything like the level of the Croats of Croatia proper, Dalmatia, Istria and Slavonia', but urging his fellow delegates to bear in mind the difficult conditions faced by the uneducated Bosnian Croat peasantry and not to equate them with the Ustasha minority. Danica Perović spoke of the role of women in the NOP, stating that 'the women of Bosnia-Herzegovina do not want a return to the old life of their slavery and darkness', but were working to build a new order 'in which their strength, suppressed for centuries, would find expression'.<sup>28</sup>

Different delegates spoke on behalf of different regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina; Hamdija Omanović, commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, spoke of the contribution being made to the NOP by Huska Miljković's former militiamen in the Una Operational Group—even though they were fighting within the Croatian Partisan framework and were only conceptually part of the Bosnian NOP. Like-

wise, the Una Operational Group commander Halil Šakanović gave a short speech. Ignac Kunecki spoke in the name of the Bosnian Poles, citing Poland's partition in 1795 and the Polish nation's long history of oppression and struggle for freedom, while Vasilj Semak spoke in the name of the Bosnian Ukrainians, citing the struggle of the Soviet Ukrainians in the Red Army. The Orthodox priest Novak Mastilović positively contrasted the NOP's vision of Serbdom with that of the Chetniks, concluding:

I, from this space, must appeal to my brother priests, above all to the Serb priests as a Serb, of course, and to plead with them to join our movement, because the priests of the Serb Orthodox Church were, in the past, always with the people and never against the people. And they must particularly be that way today, for the Serb priests were the first who were put under the murderous knife.<sup>29</sup>

Jakov Grgurić, a senior HSS politician from Livno, put forward in his speech a concept of Bosnian statehood that was very different from that of Pucar and other Communists and represented a different tradition, that of the Bosnian Croat autonomists who identified with the medieval Catholic Bosnian kingdom. According to Grgurić:

Bosnia-Herzegovina, in its past, had its own state-right tradition. Take history, and you can see that Bosnia-Herzegovina was an independent state, had its own *bans* [viceroys], it even had its own kings. On this basis, we can then judge that it is easy for us to establish a state-right act of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The state-right foundations of Bosnia-Herzegovina are merely buried, and it is now our duty to unearth the foundations, and to build on these foundations our federal unit, our state of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As a Bosnian Croat, Grgurić linked this struggle to the struggle to liberate Croatia.<sup>30</sup>

The Second Session of ZAVNOBiH voted to approve the actions taken by the Bosnian delegation at the Second Session of AVNOJ. According to this resolution:

The people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, freely and by its own will, associates with the peoples of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia in a common state—Democratic Federative Yugoslavia, on the basis of the right of every people to self-determination, including the right to secede and to unite with other peoples.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which Serbs, Muslims and Croats will live completely equally and freely, is promised in democratic and federative Yugoslavia all the rights that belong to every federated unit. The Country Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, constituting itself at its Second Session as the highest legislative and executive national representative body of Bosnia-Herzegovina, declares that it will honourably fulfil all obligations which stem from Bosnia-Herzegovina's membership of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia headed by the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia, as the supreme legislative and executive representative body of Yugoslavia and the National Committee of Yugoslavia, as the national government of Yugoslavia...

For the first time in their history, the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina equally and freely, on the basis of their own will and their own strength, are building their statehood. The Country Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the carrier of

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Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood and national sovereignty, declares that it recognises no government other than the Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia and the National Committee of the Liberation of Yugoslavia, which alone can represent the peoples of Yugoslavia internationally.<sup>31</sup>

This declaration clearly stated that Bosnia-Herzegovina was a sovereign entity enjoying the rights of every nation or people to self-determination; that its participation in the founding congress of the Yugoslav federation had been voluntary; and that ZAVNOBiH was the carrier of Bosnian statehood and sovereignty. The Yugoslav institutions were to represent the peoples of Yugoslavia internationally, but it was the individual federal units that were sovereign over their own exclusive affairs. Yet the declaration also justified itself on the basis of extra-Bosnian considerations, stating: 'only federated Bosnia-Herzegovina is a firm basis for the construction of brotherly relations between Serbs and Croats in general'.<sup>32</sup>

The Session then passed a resolution by which ZAVNOBiH was formally constituted as the 'supreme legislative and executive national representative body; the highest organ of state government in Bosnia-Herzegovina; an equal federated unit in Democratic Federative Yugoslavia'. These sovereign powers were to be exercised between sessions by the Presidency, comprising a president, three vice-presidents, a secretary and at least twenty members. The Presidency was to exercise the functions of a Bosnian government until such time as such a government could be constituted. All decisions of ZAVNOBiH and its Presidency were to be published in both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. This declaration was followed by a 'Declaration of Rights of the Citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina', recognising:

The equality of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is their common and indivisible homeland; Freedom of religion and of conscience, as well as the equality of all religions; Freedom of assembly and speech, association and the press; Security of person and of personal property, as well as the freedom of private initiative in economic life; The equality of women to men, both in the political life of the country and in all areas of social activity.<sup>33</sup>

The declaration laid down, in addition, other rights and duties of the Bosnian citizens and aims of the Bosnian government in their regard, including a guarantee of the livelihood and healthcare of every individual and the elimination of illiteracy.

These resolutions were followed by a series of further resolutions and speeches dealing with the most pressing concerns of state government. The first of these established an eight-member 'Legislative Council' before the Presidency with the task of drafting new laws and confirming whether laws passed by lower bodies were in conformity with those of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of Yugoslavia. A second resolution codified the rights and duties of NOOs at the *oblast, okrug*, district, town, municipal and village level, according to which their respective sizes and borders would be determined by ZAVNOBiH, while their members would all be elected by direct and secret ballot of the citizens. A third resolution established a 'Country Commission to Investigate the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators.' A fourth resolution established a 'Religious Commission' to advise the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH on all questions relating to religion. Detailed reports

on the conditions of the economy, healthcare and education were delivered to the Assembly by the appropriate members, emphasising the actions that ZAVNOBiH needed to achieve improvements in these fields.

The Second Session of ZAVNOBiH's final act was to elect a Presidency consisting of Kecmanović as President; Humo, Pucar and Grgurić as Vice-Presidents; Brkić as Secretary; and twenty-two additional members chosen to represent the Bosnian population as broadly as possible (apart from the female half, which was still unrepresented). The Presidency therefore included four HSS members (Grgurić, Brajković, Tolo and Sučić); the Orthodox priest Mastilović; the former Chetnik commander Pero Đukanović; the former League of Farmers senator Simo Eraković; the former deputy Great Župan Sudžuka; the former Home Guard Colonel Filipović; the industrialists Muratbeg Zaimović and Dušan Ivezić; the professors Anto Babić, Hamdija Čemerlić and Husnija Kurt; the agrarian workers Milan Bursać and Jovo Mitrašević; and several of the most prominent Bosnian Communists (Čolaković, Danilović, Karabegović, Vaso Butozan, Pašaga Mandžić, Vaso Miskin-Crni and Ilija Došen). The secretary and two out of the three vice-presidents were Communists, who therefore retained preponderance. The composition of the Presidency, as of ZAVNOBiH as a whole, was intended to reconcile Communist control with broad popular appeal. This was symbolic of the role for ZAVNOBiH envisioned by the Communists. On the one hand, it laid the foundations of the Bosnian state, in keeping with Communist ideology concerning the right of the Yugoslav lands and peoples to self-determination. On the other hand it acted as a beacon for the further recruitment of the Bosnian population into the NOP and particularly of the Muslims.

The decisions of the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH meant that the Bosnian NOP was no longer simply a movement but an embryonic state. This necessitated a clearer organisational distinction between the NOP as 'movement' and the NOP as 'state'. Immediately after the Second Session, therefore, at the village of Zdena near Sanski Most, the 'First Country Conference of the NOP for Bosnia-Herzegovina' was held, involving 150 delegates, to lay the foundation for a formal political leadership of the NOP. The conference elected an 'Executive Council of the NOP for Bosnia-Herzegovina', with Kecmanović as President and Pucar as Secretary, and a membership comprising the most prominent members of ZAVNOBiH. This body then issued a proclamation, setting forth the principles of the NOP. According to this, at the First Session:

On the basis of the right to self-determination, which the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina have achieved through their superhuman struggle, they have, through their true representatives, shown that Bosnia-Herzegovina is nobody's private domain, but the common and indivisible homeland of Serbs, Muslims and Croats, who wish, as an equal member, to unite with the other fraternal peoples of Yugoslavia in a great, common homeland of all the peoples of Yugoslavia.

Now, at the Second Session, ZAVNOBiH had 'turned itself into the first people's parliament, which has, from its midst, selected its highest state organs, whose duty is to lead the construction of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood'.<sup>34</sup> The Executive Council of the NOP then held a meeting on 23 July, at which it was resolved that the political organisation representing the NOP would be called the 'People's Liberation Front of Bosnia-Herzegovina'.

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The Partisan poet Branko Ćopić expressed the patriotic significance of the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH in an article in *Oslobođenje*. After portraying the delegates as the heirs of past heroes, rebels and muses of all three Bosnian nationalities, Ćopić wrote:

The peoples of Bosnia–Hercegovina are themselves determining their destiny. They are no longer weak and divided as they once were; this is no longer 1878 when, after the tragic Bosnian–Hercegovinian uprising, our rebel delegates, poor, ignorant and unnoticed, traversed the doorsteps and antechambers at the Berlin Congress and begged, one by one, the envoys of the Great Powers to speak at least one word in favour of their unhappy and enslaved people upon whom the others were imposing their agenda.

The speakers at the session, wrote Ćopić:

emphasised the ties and the love of the people of their regions toward the true people's government, forging fraternity through struggle; the belief of the people that they will only through this government realise a free and dignified life; and their firm determination to endure in this righteous struggle, and to invest in it all their strength and potential. The burned, plundered, dwindled and devastated people of Bosnia–Hercegovina expressed this through their representatives; a people that determinedly announces that it no longer wants a return to the old; a people steeled and bound firmly together in common struggle. Stout Hercegovina, Central Bosnia, devastated East Bosnia, valiant Drvar, heroic Kozara, burned Kupres, brotherly Cazinska Krajina.<sup>35</sup>

The regional authorities organised mass rallies to make known to the population that a Bosnian state had been established. In mid July in the Ključ district, 7,000 people apparently turned out to celebrate the actions of ZAVNOBiH and send it a message: 'We are happy and full of pride that, for the first time in history, our people of Bosnia–Hercegovina, which was until yesterday exploited by all anti-people regimes, has gained its statehood.'<sup>36</sup> A rally held in the Jajce district sent a similar greeting:

We are happy that under your leadership will be realised the age-old dream of the people of Bosnia–Hercegovina for the independent administration of their country, and that the infernal plans of those who in place of brotherhood bring discord and fratricidal strife among the peoples of Bosnia–Hercegovina will always collapse.<sup>37</sup>

At celebrations on 2 August to mark the third anniversary of the outbreak of the Bosnian Partisan uprising, a gathering said to number over 5,000 citizens of the Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo areas sent a message to ZAVNOBiH: 'We are convinced that federated Bosnia–Hercegovina is the greatest success of our three-year struggle and that such a Bosnia–Hercegovina will be the guarantor of an epoch of brotherhood and unity of all the peoples of Yugoslavia.'<sup>38</sup> Similar greetings were sent by Bosnian Partisan units; a conference of fighters of the 9<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade sent a message to ZAVNOBiH, 'our first Bosnian–Hercegovinian parliament', expressing faith that its decisions would guarantee 'the full equality of all Serbs, Muslims and Croats', and pledging, 'We are ready still further, through our arms, to defend the foundations of our young state and guarantee the final construction of federated Bosnia–Hercegovina in democratic and federative Yugoslavia. Death to Fascism—Freedom to the People!'<sup>39</sup>

The formal establishment of a Bosnian state appears to have helped the Partisans gain recognition of their authority among the populace. The Provisional Oblast NOO for Hercegovina reported on 26 August 1944 that 'the decisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of ZAVNOBiH, by which the foundations of the statehood of Bosnia-Hercegovina have been put in place', were among the principal factors leading 'the people to view genuinely the NOOs as the new state authority', as a result of which 'entry into these councils is becoming the object of ever-greater competition'.<sup>40</sup> ZAVNOBiH, Bosnian self-determination and Bosnian statehood therefore became additional recruiting symbols for the Partisans. In September the Muslim members of ZAVNOBiH issued their appeal for all Bosnian Muslims to join the NOP, citing the new status of their country: 'Federated Bosnia-Hercegovina, which it has always been the aim of the Belgrade and Zagreb reactionaries to enslave, partition and disenfranchise, represents the most complete realisation of the democracy and equality of our peoples.' The four names at the top of the list of signatories—ahead of those of the Muslim Communists—were Filipović, Zaimović, Kurt and Sudžuka.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the Communists sought to inculcate their existing Partisans with a sense of Bosnian patriotism based on ZAVNOBiH. A Bosnian KPJ internal brochure entitled 'Plan and means of political work' stressed that the fourth of five themes to be taught to the Partisans was 'Bosnia-Hercegovina as an independent federated unit in the new, democratic and federative Yugoslavia'. They were to be taught about the 'political and economic oppression and neglect of Bosnia-Hercegovina in the former Yugoslavia, and as a result of the anti-people regime', as well as about the 'independence of Bosnia-Hercegovina as a result of the live strength and armed brotherhood of the people in the struggle against the occupier'. Articles by the non-Communists Sudžuka and Kecmanović were to be set texts for these lessons. The other four themes concerned: 1) the alliance between the USSR, USA ('America') and UK ('England'); 2) the successes of Tito's policies at home and abroad; 3) 'the construction of the new democratic and federative Yugoslavia in the fire of the People's Liberation Struggle'; and 5) the NOOs, AVNOJ and the NKOJ as the sole representatives of people's government in Yugoslavia.<sup>42</sup>

The building of a broad People's Liberation Movement required that former non-Communist politicians, officials and military commanders had to be co-opted, to attract as wide a basis of popular support as possible. Yet the question necessarily arose of precisely how far the NOP should go in taking in former reactionaries and collaborators. On 8 February 1945 the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH accepted several new members, including Dr Luka Šimović, former director of the Office of Public Health in Tuzla under the NDH, who was immediately appointed chief of ZAVNOBiH's Department of People's Health. This proved uncontroversial. Yet the recruitment of the former People's Radical Party member Kosta Majkić was questioned by Jakov Grgurić, citing the reactionary role played by this party under the Yugoslav kingdom. Nevertheless, Grgurić accepted the argument of other Presidency members that Majkić should be judged by his own merits and by his behaviour during the Axis occupation, rather than by the actions of his party before the war, and the Presidency therefore unanimously accepted Majkić's membership of ZAVNOBiH. Yet in the same sitting of the Presidency,



three ZAVNOBiH members who had returned to collaboration with the enemy were now expelled: Aleksandar Preka and Ante Kamenjašević of the HSS and Ismet Bektašević of the JMO.<sup>43</sup>

## *The problem of an expanding base*

The expansion of Partisan control to include ever larger territories brought with it problems as well as opportunities. The rapid growth of the Partisan 'state' meant that a relatively small number of Communists and committed NOP activists were assuming leadership over an increasingly large section of the Bosnian population, containing a social and ethnic diversity of elements, each with its own particular fears, aspirations and prejudices. As their territories expanded, the Partisans introduced into them their system of local and regional government in order to mobilise their manpower and maintain order in their rear. This meant finding allies among the local people who were willing to run their villages on behalf of the Partisans and having them 'elected' as presidents, secretaries and councillors of the NOOs. To take and hold Muslim-inhabited areas, the collaboration of eminent Muslim notables such as Sudžuka and Bektašević was essential, as noted in Chapter 3. But to take as well as hold pro-Chetnik Serb areas, the collaboration of non-Communist Serbs was often necessary and the Partisans depended on the former Chetnik warlord Pero Đukanović to help them put down roots in the wider Srebrenica region.<sup>44</sup> More extreme measures were also employed, as the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina indicated in a report to the Provincial Committee of 12 November 1943: 'There are villages in which we must switch to harsh repression: the burning of homes; and the resettling of Chetnik families to liberated territory. Through these means, the base of the Chetnik bands is destroyed.'<sup>45</sup> Given the small initial Communist base of support, the uneducated and illiterate character of the mass of the population and the widespread popular collaboration with the Chetniks, Ustashas and Muslim militias, the KPJ inevitably came to be perched atop a 'state' which at the grass-roots level was, in both political and cultural terms, alien territory.

The NOOs had difficulty functioning, enjoying as they did only uncertain protection from the Partisans. Moreover, the broken patchwork character of Partisan territory made communications between higher and lower NOOs difficult. In November 1943 the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina complained that the NOOs in the Podgrmeč region were failing to supply the Partisan forces; it blamed this on the failure of the Okrug Committee for Podgrmeč to exercise sufficient control over them.<sup>46</sup> But 'sufficient control' required a disciplined KPJ organisation or Partisan unit able to enforce the compliance of the local authorities and this was not always available to the Communists. Where Partisan strength flagged, Chetniks and Green Forces broke up the NOOs and killed their members. When Rade Peleš, President of the Preparatory NOO for the Tuzla Okrug, took refuge from the Sixth Enemy Offensive in a village house, he was killed by Green Forces along with his son and sister-in-law.<sup>47</sup> The Okrug NOO for Banja Luka admitted on 10 April 1945 that '[o]f our district councils, up till now not one has been completely satisfactory in its work', with their members displaying 'considerable irresponsibility and

sloppiness in their work', while '[t]he quality of the municipal and village NO councils is pretty weak'. It gave the reasons for this as the lack of a skilled cadre, difficult economic conditions and enemy military activity.<sup>48</sup>

The NOOs at the village level were not efficient bodies and were prone to corruption, inefficiency, localism and reversion to the control of particular families or cliques, either those that had a high status in the village and were co-opted by the Partisans as a means of control or those that had merely thrown in their lot with the Partisans at the right moment and were thus rewarded. In the village of Dobrovo in southern Hercegovina, an NOO was formed in March 1944 whose councillors were Jozo, Mišo, Gašpo and Nikola Butingan—all members of the same family.<sup>49</sup> In the village of Radlović in the Drvar district, an NOO was elected in 1944 (the date is unknown) in which all seven councillors were named 'Radlović'.<sup>50</sup> In these circumstances, the Communists' state-building at the village level revolved around co-opting local families and patronage networks, something that involved them in the intricate yet mundane business of village politics. An example of this was in the hamlet of Jokići in the Ključ region, which sent a single representative to the village NOO of Gornji Vrbljani. In September 1943, two members of the same extended family, the Jokić family whose name the hamlet bore, contested the election to the post. The incumbent councillor, Stevan Jokić, was challenged by Dušan Jokić, who, as a widower with two young children and an elderly father to support, hoped that by becoming councillor he would evade military mobilisation. The Communist Vaso Tomić presided over an electoral contest in which neither candidate won a clear majority, but Tomić allowed Stevan to claim victory because he was a richer peasant and could therefore more credibly justify Partisan requisitioning to the local population. This result was confirmed by the KPJ authorities for the local municipality of Ribnik, which also exempted Dušan from military duty so that he could care for his family.<sup>51</sup>

Traditional communal bonds among the villagers might obstruct the Communist exercise of power, but through them the Communists could also exercise control. In the spring of 1943 when the Partisans reached the Muslim village of Palanka near Brčko, which had up till then remained outside the war, they established an NOO for the village, with Hadžip Akić, a prominent local householder as president; Asif Zemunović, an imam, as secretary; and Edhem Abadžić and Suljo Lejlić, two tradesmen, as councillors. Thus, by choosing well connected men with good local standing to head their organ of government, the Partisans ensured their control of the village. The Partisans thereupon withdrew from the village, leaving their newly selected councillors to carry out their duties on an autonomous basis, while a Partisan representative visited the village periodically to give instructions and gather information. In August 1943 about twenty or thirty village youths joined the Partisans on a voluntary basis, according to the testimony of Suljo Lejlić and his brother Dževdet; they mostly joined the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade. The Palanka NOO, as a Muslim organ of Partisan government, had an important role to play in the Partisan struggle. In January 1944, Suljo attended a conference of the District NOO as Palanka's representative. In the autumn of that year, several hundred deserters from the Handschar Division arrived in the village and were fed and housed there prior to being enrolled in the Partisans. Early in 1945, Suljo's brother Šefik contacted the local Ustasha militia, recruited from the men of the neigh-

bouring village of Boće, to arrange its surrender to the Partisans. Through the mediation of Šefik, a local man, the Ustashas were persuaded to surrender their weapons peacefully to the Partisans before fleeing the area.<sup>52</sup>

The expansion of Partisan territory to include formerly hostile segments of the population resulted in the formation of NOOs that were politically hostile to the NOP. The Drvar Okrug NOO reported in January 1944 that it had purged fourteen members of village NOOs on account of their sloppiness, irregular behaviour and Chetnik orientation.<sup>53</sup> The District NOO for Bosanski Novi reported in March that of its six municipalities, the enemy enjoyed strong influence in three, paralysing the NOOs as effective organs of government.<sup>54</sup> The Oblast NOO for Bosanska Krajina reported in April that the NOOs on its territory were widely inefficient, lazy or irresponsible in their work and that several councillors had been purged for abusing their position or for pro-Chetnik sympathies.<sup>55</sup> The political commissar of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Bosnian Brigade reported in January 1945:

So far as the P[eople's] L[iberation] Councils are concerned—I am speaking of the terrain between Doboj and Derventa, around the railway line—they, what is fundamental, do not enjoy sufficient authority and do not themselves know that they are organs of the state government; because of the influence of the Chetniks and their military offence [*sic*] they have an opportunistic stance, and I shall not err if I say that in those councils there are objectionable elements, and it is a fact that there are unchecked and untested people.<sup>56</sup>

The Communists experienced problems not only with the representative bodies in the territory they occupied but also with the very Partisan army with which they occupied it. It was an uphill struggle for Communists in the army to educate the rank-and-file Partisans so as to wean them away from chauvinism and other undesirable traits. Partisans of the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division were reported in July as being guilty of excesses against the Muslim and Croat population, including members of NOOs. This, of course, was nothing new, and Partisans were reported as distrusting even the Serb population. Partisans of longer standing were hostile to new Serb recruits from the ranks of the Chetniks, or from pro-Chetnik areas.<sup>57</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, the poor quality of the Party organisation led to ill-discipline and the defection of Partisans and even of some Communists to the Chetniks during the Sixth and Seventh Enemy Offensives. This phenomenon was noted by the UNS, which reported in May:

Among the Partisan units at Kotor Varoš, a collapse is discernible. This is particularly the case in the [13<sup>th</sup>] Krajina Brigade, where disunity has arisen on account of the religious question. Muslims and Catholics have discerned that it is a question there of a Great Serb idea, and have become discontented because of this, so that it has come to internal strife.<sup>58</sup>

The Posavina-Trebava Partisan Detachment, according to a UNS report of early June, 'has carried out up till now many crimes against the Muslim population over there'. It even operated in conjunction with a few Chetnik collaborators.<sup>59</sup>

The 15<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, formed in April 1944, was particularly full of pro-Chetnik and Serb-sectarian elements; among even the SKOJ organisation of this brigade, Muslims and Croats were widely viewed as the enemy and Chetniks as allies; one SKOJ activist murdered a Muslim woman with a knife; another sang

praises to King Aleksandar.<sup>60</sup> By October the assistant political commissar of this unit reported an improvement in its Serb fighters' view of Croats and Muslims, thanks to the presence among them of Croat and Muslim fellow-Partisans, and also reported that the unit's Partisans no longer engaged in plunder in liberated villages. But the same source expressed the fear that they would be inclined to plunder in the event that they entered a town.<sup>61</sup> The young and heterogeneous 20<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade contained large numbers of former Home Guards and Chetniks and while by the start of 1945 the Home Guards had been successfully assimilated, Chetnik tendencies were still a problem; it was reported at that time that a newly mobilised Partisan of that unit had plundered the Muslim village of Buljuk:

The Chetnik spirit of that fighter, developed during the time when he was with them, came to expression in this instance, when he called upon the civilian population to go with him to plunder that Muslim village, and that the political delegate did not oppose him or try to prevent him is evidence that our lower political leaders do not think politically, and on the other hand, that the manpower that is coming to us from the vicinity of Ključ-Mrkonjić is a new problem that we have to solve.<sup>62</sup>

Older Partisans, too, were sometimes guilty of hostility towards newer Partisans who came from the ranks of the Chetniks or Home Guards, making the latter's integration more difficult. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, according to a report of April 1945:

There could always be heard the word "Home Guard", "Chetnik", etc., and many new fighters felt offended when they heard this from some older fighter from whom they want and seek to learn a lot of things. Such behaviour towards the new comrades could not bring the older fighters together with the younger, and for many of them our army became foreign, distant, in which they could not cope and, what is more, felt that they were under some sort of guard, so that this, more than anything else, gave rise to great desertions from the unit.

This problem was, however, apparently resolved by the time of the report, thanks to the activism of the KPJ in the brigade in improving relations.<sup>63</sup>

A new development in this period was that there were now sufficient numbers of Muslim Partisans for Muslim chauvinism in Partisan ranks to become an issue. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division, it was reported in June that some Muslim Partisans and their officers were behaving incorrectly towards Croat Partisans and Croat civilians—a reflection of poor Muslim-Croat relations in the Prozor region of northern Hercegovina.<sup>64</sup> Partisans of the predominantly Muslim 19<sup>th</sup> Central Bosnian Brigade—officers as well as soldiers—were reported in October to have erred in their behaviour towards Serb villages in the overwhelmingly pro-Chetnik Teslić district, by referring to the local population as 'Chetnik people'.<sup>65</sup>

A more exotic set of problems came with the recruitment of large numbers of troops who were not even Bosnian. By the middle of April 1945 there were 2,000 Partisans from Kosovo serving in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, many of them Albanians, and several thousand Partisans from Serbia. According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps's staff, the new recruits from eastern Serbia were 'poorer in quality and politically hardly interested. In this the Vlachs in particular stand out.' These recruits lowered the overall fighting quality of the units. The fighters from Kosovo were 'altogether crude, particularly

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the Arnauts [Albanians], of whom a large number do not know our language'; the Albanians nevertheless '[g]enerally held themselves extremely well in combat' and 'injected among the new fighters a certain fighting spirit'. The one group of Albanian Partisans who performed badly were those in the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade; this was attributed to definite errors on the part of the leadership towards them. Fighters from the Čačak and Užice regions of Serbia and from one part of eastern Bosnia were considered better; nevertheless, the new recruits made the issue of cooperation among soldiers of different nationalities more difficult to solve:

The question of brotherhood has not represented a serious problem, although in the beginning there were plenty of utterances that suggested that this could become a serious problem on account of the behaviour of the Serbians toward Bosnians, and particularly toward Muslims, of whom there are a considerable number, particularly in the company and battalion leaderships.<sup>66</sup>

The political commissar of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Shock Division reported in April 1945 that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Birač Brigade 'there can be felt a considerably strong influence of the Chetniks, which is carried via the parents of the fighters who have come from Serbia'.<sup>67</sup> The youth leader of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps's 38<sup>th</sup> Shock Division reported in May that the 'brotherhood and unity of the Serb, Croat, Muslim and Albanian youth is at a sufficient level'; nevertheless, some cultural differences had become apparent among the troops:

In working with Arnaut comrades a lot of tactfulness is needed. Albanian comrades do not tolerate swearing, which is deeply rooted among our Bosnians and Serbians. They request that the comrades wean themselves away from this, because their religious regulations do not permit swearing. This is happening with considerable difficulty, because our fighters, Bosnians and Serbians, are difficult to wean. We shall work further to put this into effect.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to problems with particular territories, NOOs and Partisan units, a problem was posed for the Communists by an entire nationality: the Bosnian Croats. As 1944 progressed and the liberation of the country came closer, the lack of support for the NOP among the Bosnian Croats was increasingly recognised as a significant—perhaps the most significant—political failure of the movement. Insofar as sections of the Bosnian Croat population came to support the NOP, this was generally due either to the direct involvement of the Croatian Partisans (who had jurisdiction over a large part of the Croat-majority area of south-western Bosnia and western Hercegovina) or to the collaboration of sympathetic elements from the HSS. The Executive Committee of the HSS was nevertheless considerably weaker in Bosnia than in Croatia; only five of its thirty-two members were from Bosnia and of these, three were from the area of south-west Bosnia under Croatian Partisan leadership and only two from areas that were integral parts of Bosnian Partisan territory.<sup>69</sup>

Paradoxically, the weakness of Bosnian Croat support for the NOP meant that HSS members were more prominently displayed by the Partisans as their collaborators than were the members of any other pre-war non-Communist political party, and were highly valued by the Communists. According to Kecmanović's published wartime diary, the Executive Committee of the People's Liberation Front in March 1945 discussed the possibility of setting up a pro-Communist

wing of the JMO as had been done for the HSS, but the strength of Muslim support for the NOP apparently rendered this unnecessary.<sup>70</sup> In many areas there would never be enough HSS collaborators, while hostile HSS elements succeeded in keeping their Croat constituents out of the NOP.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, at the popular level in many regions and localities, Muslim-Croat animosity was frequently as bad as, if not worse than, Muslim-Serb animosity. The problem posed by the Bosnian Croats was serious enough to form the main item of discussion at a top level meeting on 28 November 1944 between the leaderships of the Bosnian and the Bosanska Krajina organisations of the People's Liberation Front. Senior Communists accepted the responsibility of the NOP for this failure on account of the hostile attitude of some elements in the Partisans towards the Bosnian Croat population and mistreatment of the population by such elements and the failure to devote sufficient care and attention to bringing it into the movement.<sup>72</sup>

The Bosnian Partisan leadership nevertheless struggled to keep pace with the expansion of its state. During the first half of 1944 the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH issued directives to subordinate NOOs, instructing them to collect information on the state of health, education, agriculture, the economy and other fields and to supervise agricultural activities. At the same time the inroads of the NOP into the Muslim population in East Bosnia led to a wider network of KPJ cells in the region. By the end of 1943 there were in East Bosnia 1,135 KPJ members organised in 145 cells and eighteen municipal, five district and five *okrug* committees. There were 611 KPJ members in Majevica and Semberija alone.<sup>73</sup> This intensified party activity laid the basis for further infiltration into the Muslim quisling forces in the region.

The first part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Oblast Conference of the KPJ for East Bosnia was held on 22–23 February 1944 in Vlasenica, seat of the Oblast Committee and the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, and the second part on 29 February in Bijeljina. This was the first conference of Bosnian Communists since the Ivančiči meeting of January 1942 that was attended personally by Tito. In the opening speech Vlado Popović, political commissar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps and a member of the Central Committee of the KPJ, promised:

Bosnia-Hercegovina is for the first time, comrades, a free, federative [*sic*] unit in free Yugoslavia. Bosnia-Hercegovina will have self-government; Bosnia-Hercegovina will have—and already has in many areas today—organs of its own government. Bosnia-Hercegovina will have its own army; Bosnia-Hercegovina will be organised the way that the sons of Bosnia-Hercegovina wish.<sup>74</sup>

This theme was repeated by Cvijetin Mijatović-Majo in his speech during the second part of the conference:

It is necessary to explain practically to our peoples in Bosnia-Hercegovina what it means for Bosnia-Hercegovina to be federative [*sic*]; that by this road the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina will for the first time achieve equality. It is necessary, in relation to this, to cite historical examples; it is necessary to show that Bosnia-Hercegovina will have its council; its government; its army, and that it will thus guarantee that our people live in brotherhood in its native land.<sup>75</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Oblast Conference of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina took place on 5–6 April, and reemphasised the role of the affirmation of Bosnia, its place in the

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Yugoslav Federation and the unity of Serbs, Croats and Muslims as a means of winning the political battle for the country:

Among the majority of Party organisations in our *oblast*, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian problem, as also the problem of the equal position of Bosnia-Herzegovina, has not inspired sufficient attention. The Party organisations have not sufficiently explained to the people what the federative unit of Bosnia-Herzegovina means and what the unity of Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina means with regard to the entire country and particularly to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Party organisations have not grasped that question—of the equality of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the unity of Serbs, Croats and Muslims within it—as a question through which they can most broadly reach the popular masses, and particularly the Muslims and Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina. For this reason, the politics of our state institutions, ZAVNOBiH and the Oblast People's Liberation Council, must be known to all members of the Party, elaborated and explained to the popular masses.<sup>76</sup>

The KPJ therefore engaged in a sustained campaign to implant awareness of the new Bosnian statehood among the Partisan rank and file. The assistant political commissar of the 6<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade reported, in early July, the failings of the unit's Party organisation in this regard:

Through emulation, a large part of the fighters have learnt the decisions of AVNOJ to the point that they can refer to them, but they have not yet grasped these decisions sufficiently, in particular the question of the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Federative Yugoslavia. That question still has not stirred our fighters, nor all the Communists, to see the goal of their struggle in the establishment of Federative Bosnia-Herzegovina in Federative Yugoslavia. The concept of statehood still has not penetrated among all members of the Party, as is the case with the fighters.

The unit's Party organisation resolved to rectify this through political education.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, in late July a course was held for SKOJ activists in the 6<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade in which all aspects of the Bosnian question, ZAVNOBiH, the Yugoslav Federation and Bosnia's place within it were discussed.<sup>78</sup> This was a case of trying to turn 'peasants into Bosnians'; the barrier was not so much Serb or Croat sectarian resistance to the idea but simply an inability of those with little or no education to imagine the 'imagined community' in question. As the assistant political commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade wrote of the unit's rank and file in October, '... it is difficult for these people to grasp and imagine how Bosnia-Herzegovina looks as a whole, or even Yugoslavia. It is difficult for them to grasp due to primitivism, but also due to difficulties in grasping geographic concepts. They cannot grasp "size" nor space.' Party activists tried to explain the meaning of ZAVNOBiH by emulating elections within the brigade for a village NOO and working their way up through larger regional representative bodies, all the way to ZAVNOBiH as the body for Bosnia as a whole. But even many of the Party activists themselves had difficulty grasping these concepts.<sup>79</sup>

Increasingly, the Partisans were no longer the guerrillas fighting against the existing state but were becoming the state itself, with consequent obligations toward the civilian population. With power came responsibility as well as opportunity. The continuing fighting and disruption of the Partisan administration by enemy attacks made it difficult for the Partisans to meet these obligations. The population of many parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina was in a condition of varying



degrees of hunger, and the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH reported on 3 March 1944: 'All in all, the entirety of the liberated territory cannot feed itself, even if it were exempted from supplying the army, before the new harvest.' Furthermore: 'The question of food supplies on the whole territory of Bosanska Krajina, both for the army and for the civilian population, is becoming more difficult every day... The situation in East Bosnia is essentially the same as in Bosanska Krajina.'<sup>80</sup> The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH was forced to write to the NKOJ on 19 July 1944, requesting assistance in the feeding of the Bosnian population. The Department of Agriculture and Livestock estimated on 27 November 1944 that as a result of the depredation by the occupiers and their minions livestock levels in Bosnia-Herzegovina had fallen to 20 per cent of their pre-war levels. Yet livestock was the principal livelihood of much of the population.<sup>81</sup> Supplying the large Partisan army stretched food supply to breaking point. The Communists' awareness that they were ruling over a country whose population was not only far from universally sympathetic to them but also largely poor, hungry and devastated, would add to their sense of insecurity in the months and years to come.

Pucar sent a report in March 1945 to the Central Committee summarising the degree of popular support for the embryonic new order. He noted that although the Bosnian Serbs were generally pro-NOP, this was less than universal:

There are still areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as the vicinity of Banja Luka, Kotor Varoš, areas of Ozren and Trebava, Romanija, as also parts of northern Herzegovina in which the influence of the Chetniks is still felt, although that influence is significantly weaker today than before and the people in those areas is showing an interest in the P[ople's] L[iberation] Movement.

The Serbs were, according to Pucar, increasingly accepting the abolition of the monarchy and this had improved Muslim and Croat confidence in them. So far as the Muslims were concerned, they had, over the previous year in particular, increasingly come out in support of the NOP: 'The Muslims are even the carriers of our movement in some areas and districts, such as: Livno, Prozor, Tešanj, Tuzla, Cazinska Krajina.' Nevertheless, 'still the sense that they are committed and that they are following a democratic programme has not implanted firm roots'. The Muslims still felt the need for some form of Muslim leadership under the new order, that would defend their interests in place of the 'Muslim reaction', which was, according to Pucar, still attempting to reassert its influence over the Muslim masses precisely by appealing to this need. Pucar therefore predicted a difficult struggle ahead against the 'Muslim reaction' for the political loyalty of the Muslim population.

As for the Bosnian Croats, Pucar wrote: 'They still today, for the most part, remain outside the movement.' Indeed: 'Only in individual districts have we succeeded in a local framework in exercising influence over the Croats and binding them to our movement (Tuzla, Livno and partly Sanski Most and Bugojno).' The continued mobilisation of large numbers of Bosnian Croats in the enemy forces made the Bosnian Croat population reluctant to support the Partisans who were fighting against those forces. Pucar nevertheless accepted that the Communists were responsible for the failure to win over the Bosnian Croats: 'There is no doubt that to this failure of our movement among the Bosnian Croats has also contributed, in great measure, our rigid and unreconstructed attitude towards them.' Pucar

in particular blamed the Communists' slowness in recruiting HSS members into the NOP. He now perceived a desperate political assault on the NOP on the part of HSS elements that were anti-Communist but untainted by involvement with the Ustasas. Both Muslim and Croat reactionaries were linking up with pro-Chetnik elements in opposition to the new order. Meanwhile the KPJ on both the terrain and in the army widely lacked sufficient numbers of quality cadres.<sup>82</sup>

The inevitable solution to the problem of how to rule over large segments of population that were hostile to the new order was the development of an internal security apparatus. On 23 May 1944 Tito, in his role as Supreme Commander, ordered the establishment of the 'Department for the Protection of the People' [*Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda*], as the Partisans' intelligence and counter-intelligence service. It would be federally organised on the basis of the six republics and the autonomous entities of Kosovo-Metohija and Vojvodina.<sup>83</sup> On 15 August 1944 the NKOJ decreed: 'For the sake of the security of the rear of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia, and to maintain order on the liberated territory of Yugoslavia, a Corps for People's Defence is being founded.' Its principal tasks were the suppression of hostile uprisings; the liquidation of Chetnik, Ustasha and other enemy bands operating behind Partisan lines; and the safeguarding of the security of the central bodies of state and government and of the key state utilities and assets.<sup>84</sup>

### *'Feminist errors'*

The diverse character of the rapidly expanding NOP was highlighted by an internal conflict concerning the appropriate policy of the Antifascist Front of Women. This body was intended by the Communist leadership to be merely a pliable front organisation through which women could be mobilised into the NOP. In fact, like other organs of the Partisan movement representing particular sectional interests, it had a tendency to develop a life of its own that went beyond what the Central Committee desired. At the most moderate level, activists of the Antifascist Front of Women often disengaged from aspects of the struggle not related to their work with women. Thus, for example, they restricted themselves to literacy classes and other educational work with peasant women. This may have been related to a tendency among the formally politically-correct male Communists who dominated the movement to marginalise or overlook their female comrades, leading to the latter's retreat into this one area that was their secure preserve. But it may also have reflected a genuine awareness among some women activists of the movement's deficiency in its work with women and a corresponding enthusiasm to devote themselves to this promising area of activity. Yet this sort of self-will was ultimately perceived as dangerous by the movement's leadership.

Sexism within the KPJ and the Partisans was a lingering problem. The Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina reported in May 1943:

Certainly the work of the Antifascist Front of Women has been inadequate; the massive participation of women in the People's Liberation Struggle has not been sufficiently utilised, and it is a great error of all our organisations and above all of the Party leadership that the fervour of the women was not used for the political enlightenment of the women, but primarily for the performance of mundane, so to speak, physical jobs concerning the needs of the army.<sup>85</sup>

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Similarly, the Political Department of the 12<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade reported on 3 September 1943 a pattern of 'Incorrect behaviour toward women comrades. This incorrectness manifests itself, above all, in the establishment of unhealthy relations that assume the character of prostitution.' Furthermore: 'Further incorrectness takes the form of the complete sidelining of women comrades and a failure to respect their authority, with their being confined to the roles of cooks and horse-tenders and treated as servants.'<sup>86</sup> On 19 November 1943 Đoko Vujošević was dismissed from the post of political commissar of the 6<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Brigade for reasons that included 'poor and un-Communist treatment of women-comrades'.<sup>87</sup> As late as August 1944 it was reported in the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigade:

that relations between men and women comrades have become worse; that is, that they are daily assuming a more incorrect form, which has resulted in the strict raising of this issue as a problem on the one hand, and on the other the expulsion or more strict censuring of members of the Party.<sup>88</sup>

Sexist or patriarchal attitudes were apparent among women Communists as well as men; it was reported that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Krajina Brigade attempts to regulate sexual relations among comrades had:

given rise to a belief among women comrades that the question of marriage can be solved while they are in the brigade, while the prospects for this after the war are poor. This has created the belief among them: that they need to tie themselves to a leader or member of the Party, and the Party will push him into 'marrying'.<sup>89</sup>

The limits to the Communists' ability or readiness to bridge the gender gap are illustrated by the composition of the Bosnian organs of state. Only four of the approximately 170 delegates at the First Session of ZAVNOBiH were women and only seven of the approximately 197 delegates of the Second Session, none of whom was elected to the Presidency. An indication of the residual traditionalist view of gender roles within the ranks of the NOP is the set of tasks issued by the Sarajevo Local Committee of the KPJ to the city's Antifascist Front of Women on the eve of the liberation of the city in April 1945: the women activists were to prepare accommodation and organise a celebratory greeting for the Yugoslav Army troops as they entered the city.<sup>90</sup>

Conversely, by the end of 1943 certain sections of the Antifascist Front of Women had come to see their struggle in explicitly feminist, rather than purely antifascist terms. The Central Committee complained in December 1943 both of administrative separatism on the part of sections of the Antifascist Front of Women—whereby the latter was acting as a state within a state—and of 'errors that tend toward feminism—something that has not had serious consequences only due to the fact that the work of the Antifascist Front of Women was in the hands of comrades loyal to the Party'. The Central Committee reminded subordinate bodies of the Party:

Women are not some sort of separate part of the people; rather—together with men—they themselves constitute the people and must have the same rights and duties as other citizens. Our basic task is not, therefore, to establish some kind of women's organisation, society or similar, but to develop a mass movement of women; more precisely, to move women to participate on a mass basis in the people's struggle.<sup>91</sup>

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The critique of these 'errors' in the Antifascist Front of Women was sent in January 1944 to all *oblast* Party organisations, which then forwarded it to subordinate Party bodies.<sup>92</sup>

Although it was in Croatia that these 'errors' were most apparent, 'the situation in Croatia is mostly similar to the situation in other areas'. In Bosanska Krajina, the problem was relatively more pronounced owing to the presence of the Central Council of the Antifascist Front of Women, with jurisdiction over all of Yugoslavia. Thus, in Bosanska Krajina as elsewhere, local bodies of the Front looked not to their corresponding KPJ body but directly to the higher bodies of the Front; this led to the organisational separation of the Front from the Party.<sup>93</sup> In some places in Bosanska Krajina, activists of the Oblast Committee of the Antifascist Front of Women toured the region independently of KPJ bodies; in some areas, women activists established their own apparatuses, treasuries and culture houses, separate from the rest of the NOP. In the village of Halilovci near Sanski Most it appears that a 'women's municipality' was established. In the face of widespread 'errors' of this kind, the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina complained: 'From this, it appears that the work of the A[ntifascist] F[ront] of W[omen] is not conceived as a sector of Party work, but as a completely separate organisation.' The Oblast Committee responded by reshuffling the women activists between committees, breaking up the incipient feminist networks.<sup>94</sup> The Oblast Committee for Hercegovina instructed its subordinate bodies to rectify any such errors, expressing the fear that 'Such errors could lead even to the Antifascist Front of Women becoming a purely feminist organisation, which would struggle for exclusively women's interests outside of the People's Liberation Movement, dividing the people's progressive forces into two parts: men and women.'<sup>95</sup> The Oblast Committee reported in April 1944 that the Hercegovina Oblast Antifascist Front of Women had organised a course for twenty-five female activists for the purpose of rectifying such errors.<sup>96</sup> It appears that the 'errors' were rapidly stamped out and did not manifest themselves again during the war.

The Communists were nevertheless sincere in their desire to see the position of their female comrades improved and continued their efforts at raising the status of women within the NOP. The Antifascist Front of Women held a rally at the village of Sanica near Ključ on 8 March 1944 to celebrate International Women's Day. The speakers addressed a mixed crowd of Serb and Muslim women, speaking to them of Rosa Luxemburg; of the more favourable position of women abroad; of the international women's movement; and of what women would receive from a Partisan victory. Many of the women Partisans who were present were themselves carrying weapons, emphasising their equality. According to one eyewitness: 'When the rights of women to live in equality with men and to do the same jobs as them were spoken of, the Muslim women, obviously excited about hearing this for the first time, began almost unconsciously to lift their veils. They listened to every word.' One young woman said at the time: 'We unhappy ones thought that it was determined that we should live in this way and that it could not be otherwise. And can you tell us how this time will come about?'<sup>97</sup> The Party leadership valued Muslim women activists; Pucar wrote to the Central Committee in September 1944 asking to be sent Ajša Maličević: 'The comrade is a woman; a member of the Party [since] 1942. She could be extremely useful to us in Muslim villages and regions, because we have very few of these Muslim women.'<sup>98</sup>

For all this, as the new Yugoslav military wound up its wartime mobilisation towards the end of 1945, it was women fighters, along with the oldest and youngest Partisans, who were among the first to be demobilised.<sup>99</sup>

### *The Partisan reconquest of Hercegovina*

The incorporation of Hercegovina into the Partisan state, begun in earnest following the Italian capitulation in the summer and autumn of 1943, involved essentially the conquest of hostile territory by an alien army supported by a minority of local activists. Outside the regional capital of Mostar and other towns, Hercegovina was the *oblast* where support for the Partisans was weakest. The Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Hercegovina reported in September 1943: 'we have confirmed that the Party organisation on the terrain of Hercegovina is in an extremely bad condition, which is, certainly, typical of the entire Party organisation of Hercegovina'.<sup>100</sup> In this context, the restoration of Partisan control over Hercegovina involved effectively a reconquest from the Chetniks in the eastern part of the oblast and an outright conquest from the Ustasas in the west. The reconquest of eastern Hercegovina began long before the overall Partisan victory was assured and the Communists were ready to make substantial concessions to the widely pro-Chetnik population in order to put down roots among it. This raised the question of who was really colonising whom.

Following the dissolution of the General Staff of Bosnia-Hercegovina in April 1943 the regular Hercegovinian Partisan units were no longer under Bosnian command. The 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade, the elite unit containing the cream of the Hercegovinian Partisans, was heavily mauled during the Fifth Enemy Offensive to the point where it was 'more a nominal than a real brigade of our army (given its numbers and fighting capability)'. In June 1943 the Supreme Command separated it from the Chief Operational Group and sent it back to Hercegovina. The 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade's morale was low, for 'among us there reigned the belief that our army at Zelengora, Sutjeska and Foča had been smashed, as a result of which both our sympathisers and our brigade's old fighters were prone to passivity'. The Brigade nevertheless traversed Hercegovina, crushing Chetnik resistance and gathering new recruits, so that by the end of October it numbered approximately 1,760 fighters. However, 'since the entire influx of our new fighters has been for a long time in the ranks of an anti-people army (the Chetniks), many errors and deviations are manifesting themselves that are spoiling the reputation of our army'. The condition of Partisan cadres, particularly political, in the Brigade was 'bad'.<sup>101</sup> The then Oblast Secretary for Hercegovina Uglješa Danilović recalled that in order to regain a foothold in this largely Chetnik territory the Partisans were forced to treat former Chetniks leniently: 'we adopted a very mild course towards all those who had been in the Chetniks, but who did not err by committing crimes. These we disarmed and sent home, which proved to be extremely advantageous for the further differentiation among, and disintegration of, the Chetniks'.<sup>102</sup>

Meanwhile the predominantly Serb countryside of Eastern Hercegovina remained heavily influenced by over a year of Chetnik rule. Danilović reported to the Provincial Committee on 17 July 1943 that 'among the greater part of the

population there is no desire for struggle against the occupier, consequently the response to mobilisation into the 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade has been almost nil'. This was, Danilović wrote, the result of Chetnik propaganda combined with the occupiers' offensive into Hercegovina, during which the Germans dealt a heavy blow to the Chetnik organisation; 'at least half' the population of Hercegovina was 'inclined towards the Partisans', but its attitude was 'vacillating both in relation to the occupier and to the Chetniks'. Both the Chetniks and the Partisans were finding it difficult to mobilise among the Hercegovinian Serbs, even among those who were sympathetic to one or the other movement, on account of widespread demoralisation. However, 'the great majority of the population of Hercegovina is today in a state of vacillation and waiting. Our forces and those of the Chetniks are almost equal and the masses are not declaring for one side or the other'. Danilović claimed that a year of rule by the Chetniks had largely discredited them in the eyes of the population, but the Partisans were unable to take advantage of this on account of the weakness of the Party organisation: following the Partisan withdrawal from Hercegovina the previous year, the KPJ had ceased to exist in the Nevesinje and Gacko districts and existed only formally in other Hercegovinian districts, except for Trebinje. In the villages most KPJ members had either been liquidated or gone over to the Chetniks. Those remaining on the terrain were unable to organise as a Party given the difficulty of the conditions.<sup>103</sup>

The Italian collapse in the summer and autumn of 1943 enabled the Partisans to go on the offensive in Hercegovina and to rapidly expand the territory under their control. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian and 3<sup>rd</sup> Shock Divisions and the 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade disarmed part of one Italian division while the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Division went over to them. In November 1943 the enlarged 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade was transformed into the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division and placed within the Montenegro-based 2<sup>nd</sup> Shock Corps. The 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division was to consist of the original unit, the 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade and two new ones: the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hercegovinian Brigades, soon renamed the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigades.

Nevertheless, the strengthening of the Partisan elite units in Hercegovina at this time did not imply firm roots in the population of the region. The Chetniks retained a strong hold on the Serb population in both the towns and countryside, one that extended even to ethnic Serbs serving in the NDH bureaucracy.<sup>104</sup> On 12 September 1943 Danilović reported from Hercegovina that 'the Chetniks are not yet broken, either militarily or politically' and that 'it seems to me that this could be their main base in the future'. He therefore called for additional Partisan forces to be sent to Hercegovina to improve the Partisan position.<sup>105</sup> In order to encompass the newly mobilised Hercegovinian Partisans the Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Shock Corps ordered on 22 November the formation of a Hercegovinian Division to consist of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the newly formed 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Hercegovinian Brigades. In this period the Chetnik movement in Hercegovina and south-east Bosnia began to fracture, with one section remaining faithful to the movement and another going over to the Partisans. Indeed there was great confusion among the Chetniks, with many of them fighting alongside the Partisans in particular battles or donning the red star emblem without integrating themselves fully into the Partisan armies.<sup>106</sup>

The Serb population of Hercegovina widely perceived the Partisans to be conquerors rather than liberators, and in places fled before the Partisan advance.<sup>107</sup> The Staff of the Mostar Battalion reported on 23 November that the Serb inhabitants of their area of operations in Hercegovina feared the Battalion's retribution for the Chetnik slaughter of its troops in the spring of 1942; they therefore sought the assistance of a Serb Partisan unit that would provide reassurance to the inhabitants.<sup>108</sup> The Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade reported in December 1943 that in the Bileća district: 'The Chetnik leaders are scaring the masses with talk of the occupiers' terror, so that the greatest part are too afraid to go over to us.'<sup>109</sup> The staff of the 11<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade reported in February 1944 that the people of Hercegovina were less willing to join the Partisans than Bosnians from other parts of the country because they felt compromised:

The popular masses in Hercegovina foresee the imminent collapse of the Chetnik struggle and the unjustness of the struggle that they are waging, but they nevertheless do not join our ranks en masse, because many have dirtied their hands in crimes against our fighters. Abuse in Hercegovina on the part of the Chetniks was too great and excessive and because of that they do not join our ranks, fearing deserved punishment.<sup>110</sup>

The Partisans were forced until 1944 to rely upon requisitioning rather than voluntary contributions from the population to feed their army.<sup>111</sup> The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH admitted as late as the spring of 1944 that the NOP in Hercegovina 'still has not become a general people's movement' and that 'in its framework, brotherhood among the peoples still has not broadly been realised'.<sup>112</sup>

The defeats sustained by the Partisans in the Sixth Enemy Offensive allowed the Chetniks in Hercegovina to recover the initiative, as the Oblast Committee of the KPJ reported in February 1944, so that the Partisan position remained weak and the Chetniks retained the upper hand and greater popular support across large parts of the region; they agitated for the annexation of Hercegovina to Nedić's Serbia and continued to terrorise Partisan sympathisers and family members. When the Partisans launched an offensive in this period to clear the Chetniks from the area of Hercegovina bordering on Montenegro, 'almost the entire adult male population fled before us, some with the Chetniks to the Kraut garrisons, and one part withdrew into cracks and caves. There are cases where they drove their livestock with them.'<sup>113</sup> Indeed so well entrenched were the Chetniks in Hercegovina that Danilović, in a letter to the Provincial Committee in April 1944, suggested requesting Allied air-strikes against them: 'The Chetnik military forces, which now number over 2,500, are situated in the towns together with the Krauts and from there make periodic excursions. It would be extremely advantageous politically if the Allies would bomb these garrisons.'<sup>114</sup> As late as late August 1944, the Oblast Committee admitted:

The greatest problem in East Bosnia still remains Chetnikism. It could not be said that in Hercegovina Chetnikism is not fairly massive and that it is not tied to the Serb masses... The fact is that the Chetniks are still today in a position to bring together a large part of the Serb masses, maybe even more than we can.<sup>115</sup>

Conversely, most of the Muslim population and one part of the Serb population were sympathetic to the Partisans, though in February it was still mostly among



the Serbs that the Partisans were able to mobilise, while the Croats remained mostly hostile.<sup>116</sup>

The expansion of the Partisans in Hercegovina in this period, the replenishment of old units and the establishment of new ones from freshly recruited local Serbs meant absorbing large numbers of former Chetniks and Chetnik sympathisers, so that these units frequently assumed a 'Chetnik' character. This problem affected each Hercegovinian Partisan unit to varying degrees and was accentuated by the low quality of KPJ cadres within them. Even the flagship 10<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade, a veteran and genuinely multinational unit, was reported in February 1944 as suffering from the combined effects of a weak Party organisation and Chetnik-influenced new recruits.<sup>117</sup> The problems were worse in the newer Hercegovinian units. The 11<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade was formed in November 1943; in the words of its deputy political commissar: 'Into its composition went three battalions. The battalions were made up in the majority of newly mobilised fighters. A certain number of fighters came from Chetnik ranks and thereby brought into our units the remains of marked Chetnik bands.' The KPJ organisation in the brigade, meanwhile, was 'fairly weak'.<sup>118</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade was formed in November 1943 and was renamed the '12<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade' soon after. Its deputy political commissar reported in January 1944: 'The composition of the fighters of our brigade is in the majority Serbs from the territory of Hercegovina, and there are also some Muslims who were mobilised and today are joining our ranks. The majority of these fighters were in the ranks of the Chetniks...'<sup>119</sup>

Consequently, the Communists, in their political-educational work among the troops, saw their most important tasks as including 'the raising of the political consciousness of the fighters, acquainting them with the problems of the People's Liberation Struggle, establishing correct relations between male and female comrades, the unmasking of erroneous views regarding Muslims, particularly among fighters who come from Chetnik ranks, and suppressing plunder', as the same source reported the following month.<sup>120</sup> By May, definite improvements had been registered in moulding the former Chetniks into disciplined Partisans, though their political consciousness was not yet at the desired level; in particular, 'the exposure of the treasonous reactionary clique, King Petar and the monarchy, was not correctly understood by the fighters'.<sup>121</sup> The ability to educate the fighters was limited by the fact that the Party organisation cadres in the brigade were themselves reported to be of inadequate quality as late as August.<sup>122</sup> The SKOJ organisation for the Hercegovina *oblast* noted in the same month that the Hercegovinian youth was still sharply divided between Partisan and Chetnik supporters and that there was widespread hatred between the two groups, making it very difficult to mobilise the pro-Chetnik youth: 'Neither does the Partisan youth want to recruit them into their organisation, nor do they want to join, they are so bitter towards each other.'<sup>123</sup>

The scale of the problem posed by former Chetniks in Partisan ranks is highlighted by the fact that the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division, which encompassed all regular Partisan forces in Hercegovina, numbered 8,000 by mid January 1945; 5,500 of these had been mobilised in the previous four months, 'in large part from the ranks of the Chetniks'. This meant that a very large proportion, possibly an

absolute majority, of Hercegovinian Partisans by the start of the last year of the war were former Chetniks. Although the proportion of Muslims and Croats was increasing, many of these, too, had belonged to quisling formations. Meanwhile there were only 1,000 KPJ members in the division.<sup>124</sup> In one of the division's subordinate units, the 14<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Youth Brigade, it was noted at this time:

Fighters who had previously been in the Devil's Division' [a Croat unit of the Wehrmacht] or in the Chetniks are little interested in that which is told to them, and the line of our struggle does not go easily into their heads. These, like other forcibly mobilised fighters, who are in the majority from enemy ranks, have still not been brought up and bound to the line of our struggle.<sup>125</sup>

The Partisan position in Hercegovina began to improve with the increasing Partisan military successes. By August the Muslims in Hercegovina were reported to be joining the Partisans en masse.<sup>126</sup> The Provisional Oblast NOO for Hercegovina reported on 19 August of the same year that although 'the Chetnik stronghold in our *oblast* is still very solid', yet the Partisan resilience in the face of enemy assaults was creating a sense among the Hercegovinian Serbs of 'the invincibility of our brave fighters' and a 'strengthened and more entrenched belief in their new people's government', while among the Muslims and Croats 'Ustasha influence over them has significantly lessened'. A new Muslim and a new Croat Partisan battalion were formed, while the Muslim militia increasingly avoided conflict with the Partisans. In order to win acceptance among the generally hostile Muslims and Croats of the Hercegovinian countryside, the Communists sought to transport Muslim and Croat NOP activists from the towns to participate in rallies and elections for NOOs.<sup>127</sup> Yet for all this, there was considerable distrust and hostility among the predominantly Serb Hercegovinian Communists toward local Croats. Todo Kurtović, who served as secretary of the District Committee of the KPJ for Trebinje and secretary of the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for South East Hercegovina, recalls with particular reference to the Communists of Čapljina:

There was, even, strong opposition to creating an organisation, in other words that Croats be accepted into the Party, even in 1945. If someone had for even one day been forcibly mobilised into the Ustashes, they deemed him rejected for all time. Such people were not bothered that someone had been in the Chetniks. There was a tendency toward inequality and unequal standards.<sup>128</sup>

Reinforcing the Communists' problems in integrating Hercegovina into the Bosnian NOP was a sense of Hercegovinian separateness vis-à-vis Bosnia proper that appears to have been felt at all levels of the Hercegovinian NOP. The 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division, which covered the *oblast*, was grouped with the Montenegrin and Sanjak Partisan units in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Shock Corps, rather than with either of the Bosnian corps. The political commissar of the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division informed its subordinate brigades at the start of March 1945 that 'we are ever more drawing close to Bosnia; we are about to enter that country'. He therefore warned them:

It should not be allowed to be commented and spoken about 'what do we want to be in Bosnia for, when we have liberated Hercegovina?'. That kind of talk is hostile and it can only damage the solidity of our army. Against that, it is necessary to develop a campaign

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which will create an obligation among all our fighters, persuading him of the duty to fight for a free Bosnia just as for a free Hercegovina, because Bosnia and Hercegovina are one federal unit, because that is the only happy solution for the people of Bosnia–Hercegovina.<sup>129</sup>

Hercegovina would nevertheless remain the part of Bosnia–Hercegovina where Ustasha and Chetnik bands resisted the new order most persistently following liberation.

Hercegovina's distinctiveness was recognised in the name of the representative body for the *oblast*, founded on 19 September 1944 at Gacko, with the grandiose title 'Oblast People's Liberation Parliament of Hercegovina'—though the word 'parliament' appears to have been soon dropped in favour of the usual 'council'.<sup>130</sup> Hercegovinian distinctiveness was manifested in the territorial arrangement for Bosnia–Hercegovina decided upon by the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH in November, in which the country would be divided into six equal administrative units, but Hercegovina alone would bear the name '*oblast*' while the others would be '*okrugs*'.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, the Hercegovinian Communists saw their ultimate salvation as lying in popular identification with Bosnia and Bosnian statehood transcending narrower sectarian divisions. As the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Hercegovina stated in a directive to subordinate Hercegovinian KPJ bodies in early November:

If the P[eople's] L[iberation] F[ront] gathers around itself the entire people then the achievements of our struggle will be totally guaranteed for us. It follows from this that the P[eople's] L[iberation] F[ront] here in Hercegovina will have as its basic task the realisation of the decision of the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH, and that in its political activity it must endeavour that the question of Bosnia–Hercegovina as a particular federal unit in federative Yugoslavia should become the blood and flesh of every Hercegovinian—the elevated consciousness of a just solution and the satisfaction of the most fundamental interests of Serbs, Croats and Muslims.<sup>132</sup>

### *The 18th Croat Brigade*

The successes of the NOP brought expansion. But this was a double-edged sword: the more the NOP expanded from the loyal core of Partisans and their supporters that existed in November 1942, the more it took in elements whose loyalty to the struggle and, subsequently, to the new order, was questionable. Early on in the NOP, in the spring of 1942, the Communists had come to grief when a large portion of the Serb rebel units under their command—nominally 'Partisan' but often more Chetnik in their sympathies—had gone over to the Chetniks, killing many of their Partisan commanders and comrades in the process. As the NOP expanded from 1943 onward to include large numbers of Muslims and Croats as well as Serbs the pattern was repeated among new units, of expansion, desertion and contraction to a stable core of reliable Partisans. This was a necessary part of the process of the creation of a genuinely multinational, all-Bosnian Partisan army out of the human raw material thrown up by war and revolution.

Just as the NOP had subverted the predominantly Croat and Muslim NDH forces from within, so the Ustashes sought, with some success, to subvert Muslim

or Croat Partisan units; this was highlighted by the fate of the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade, the flagship Bosnian Croat Partisan unit. The unit was formed on 10 October following the liberation of Tuzla at a ceremony held at Husino in commemoration of the miners' uprising of 1920. It was a wholly new unit formed from the untried new recruits from Tuzla and the Croat villages of the mining districts of Kreka and Husino. In the words of its staff: 'As the first Croat brigade on the territory of all Bosnia-Hercegovina, it had the important political task of drawing the Croat masses, who were the most vacillating, as much as possible behind the People's Liberation Struggle.' Yet the unit, initially 90 per cent Croat, was largely composed of former Home Guards, and lacked Communist cadres sufficient to ensure its discipline. Its ability to mobilise Croats waned the further it travelled from proletarian Tuzla and its non-Communist command cadres were unreliable.<sup>133</sup> The Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps noted that the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade 'did not offer sufficient resistance to the Germans' during their counter-offensive around Tuzla, and that 'the reason for this was its unconfident military leadership, which is largely made up of Home Guard officers who went over to our army during the liberation of Tuzla'.<sup>134</sup>

Soon after the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade's formation its staff executed two of its soldiers in an effort to halt desertions among raw recruits, but success was only temporary. The Staff reported on 13 November that fifty to sixty soldiers led by two company commanders—former Home Guards—had deserted under the influence of a Catholic priest working for the Germans who had contacted them via their parents in German-held Tuzla and offered amnesty in return for their desertion. The Staff noted: 'There exists a further possibility that in our ranks there are more fifth columnists, that there will be cases of organised desertion and that the enemy will try to infiltrate its agents into our ranks.' It recommended that the 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade be removed from the vicinity of Tuzla, so as to separate its soldiers as much as possible from their homes.<sup>135</sup> The NDH's Chief Directorate for Public Order and Security reported on 25 November that nearly two thirds of the Partisans of the newly formed 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade, themselves mostly former Home Guards, had already surrendered to the Germans and that the remainder was waiting for a chance to follow suit.<sup>136</sup> Indeed the Staff of the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade reported at the end of the month that it had uncovered a plot by former gendarmes in its ranks to kill the commanding cadres and overthrow the Brigade from within. The plot was foiled and following the defection of the coup leader (a Partisan deputy battalion commander) to the Germans, the Staff executed three other conspirators.<sup>137</sup> As the political commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division admitted in February 1944, 'into this brigade had been drawn, in a significant number, Ustasha and fascist elements who roamed within it, stymied its growth and organised desertions', as a result of which the brigade's strength had fallen from 500 to 120.

The Partisans, nevertheless, would not dissolve the Brigade, which continued to exist for the sake of the Partisans' standing among the Croats of north-east Bosnia; they hoped to use it to win over previously hostile sections of the Croat population.<sup>138</sup> In March 1944 the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Vlasenica noted: 'The establishment of Croat and Muslim brigades has enabled us to spread that armed brotherhood in our areas among Serbs, Muslims and Croats. Therefore it is necessary to popularise, in every place, the Croat and Muslim brigades.'<sup>139</sup> Indeed despite its inauspicious start, the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade was, apparently, ulti-

mately a success story. It finally salvaged its reputation in July 1944 when it liberated the town of Tešanj from the Germans.<sup>140</sup> In November 1944 its assistant political commissar, no doubt with a certain feeling of pride, reported:

This brigade truly represents a symbol of forged brotherhood. Of four battalions, one is expressly formed of Muslims, the second has a Croat majority (workers from Kreka and Husino) and the third is composed of a majority of Serbs, from Posavina, while the fourth is mixed. The comradeship and confidence among the battalions is extremely high. This brigade carries the appellation 'Croat', although it has the smallest percentage of Croats, but still there has never been heard a complaint from even one of the fighters as to why it carries this appellation when in it there are more of both Serbs and Muslims.<sup>141</sup>

### *Huska Miljković and the Una Operational Group*

The inability of the Partisans, Ustashas, Chetniks or Germans to force their will upon the Muslim population and the desperate attempt of each to win the favour of the latter are perhaps best demonstrated by the running battle, in this period, for influence over the Muslim militias of the Cazinska Krajina. There, the main contenders in the war in Yugoslavia were forced to kowtow to a single Muslim warlord whose mastery of three thousand Muslim troops gave him the casting vote in the outcome of the struggle in this part of the country.

The fall of the Partisans' so-called 'Bihać Republic' in early 1943 left Cazinska Krajina, the most solidly Muslim and perhaps the most socially backward part of Bosnia, once again without direct rule by any outside authority. By the autumn of 1943 the region's population had largely lost faith in the Germans and hated the Chetniks, but Ustasha influence remained strong and the Partisans were perceived as a 'Vlach' (a derogatory word for Serb) army.<sup>142</sup> Although the Partisan occupation of the region in late 1942 and early 1943 created a favourable impression among some sections of the Muslim population, the Communists had not succeeded in putting down strong roots in the area. Following the Partisan withdrawal in early 1943 the region remained one of weak Communist activity.<sup>143</sup>

The Partisan withdrawal created a vacuum that was filled, during 1943, by the emergence of the most stubbornly independent and primitive Muslim militia to appear during the war. Its commander, the ambitious local warlord Huska Miljković, turned large parts of the Cazinska Krajina into his personal fiefdom, using the remnants of the local military and civilian structures the Partisans had established during the brief existence of the 'Bihać Republic'. Miljković succeeded for a while in maintaining his independence from both sides by playing them off against one another and was the object of a continuous courtship rivalry between the Communists and the Ustashas. His remarkable story was recorded after the war by Šukrija Bijedić, his principal Partisan collaborator, whose memoirs form the principal source for what follows.<sup>144</sup>

Like some of the Bosnian Chetnik warlords, Miljković was originally a Communist and had been a founding member of the Communist organisation for his native Velika Kladuša, established in 1937 under the Okrug Committee of the KPH for Karlovac. Miljković held various positions in the Party and worked on the preparation of the uprising in Kordun in Croatia in 1941, but in July two of his fellow Communists were killed by the Ustashas, who almost succeeded in

killing Miljković himself, shooting at him and chasing him into the forest.<sup>145</sup> Miljković fled to Velika Kladuša, where he established contact with the town's mayor, Hasan Miljković (sources differ as to whether the two were relatives). Huska was then imprisoned by the Ustashas, released on the intervention of the Great Župan and recruited into the Home Guard before he ran away to join the Partisans again. In December 1941 Huska became first Secretary of the newly formed District Committee of the KPH for Velika Kladuša, where he also served as Commander of the Partisan Local Command following its liberation in February 1942. Huska was subsequently appointed Secretary of the District Committee for Cazin but fell into disfavour within the Party, where it was reported that he 'swerves from the Party line', was 'crude in his performance of his duties' and 'behaves towards everyone like a Führer'.<sup>146</sup>

Huska was removed from his post in late 1942 on account of his indiscipline and irregular behaviour; he took his dismissal very badly. During the Fourth Enemy Offensive he expressed his scepticism towards the Communists' strategy, asking his comrades what the point was of sacrificing their lives when the Red Army would defeat Hitler anyway. He deserted from the Partisans during the offensive and was tried by them and sentenced to hard labour, but escaped and returned to the Cazinska Krajina to take advantage of the connections he had forged as KPH organiser to begin building a new Muslim militia on the ruins of the Partisan 'state'. Huska rejoined the Home Guard through the intervention of Hasan and was an effective commander against the Partisans, hunting and persecuting them and their families mercilessly.

Huska's successes against the Partisans in Cazinska Krajina earned him the respect of the Germans and he eventually won the permission of the Ustasha regime to form a Muslim militia linked to Hasan's 'Krajina Council', as a Muslim autonomist body friendly to the Germans and Ustashas. For his part, Hasan allegedly hoped to use Huska's militia to bring about the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina within the NDH.<sup>147</sup> Miljković built his militia as a coalition of former Ustashas, HSS supporters and deserters from the Partisans and Home Guard, numbering about 3,000 by late 1943. The militia rapidly came into conflict with the Partisan forces in the Cazinska Krajina, which in April 1943 had been organised as an 'Una Operational Group' under the command of the General Staff for Croatia. The name referred to the Bosnian territory north-west of the River Una—that is, the Cazinska Krajina—which owing to the geographical barrier presented by the river was still under Croatian Partisan jurisdiction. As well as Partisan forces from Kordun and Banija in Croatia, the Una Operational Group included the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, the Partisans' flagship Muslim unit recruited in the region. The Group was nevertheless dissolved in the autumn of 1943.

In this borderland between Croatia and Bosnia, it was consequently the Croatian Communists who assumed the task of neutralising the threat posed by Huska's militia. In the autumn of 1943 the Staff of the Cazin Detachment began to form links with Partisan sympathisers in the militia's ranks for the purposes of a coup against Huska.<sup>148</sup> This effort of the Partisans was unsuccessful. In November the 7<sup>th</sup> Shock Division took Cazin, but Huska counter-attacked and drove it from the town. He arrested about 160 NOP sympathisers in Cazin and gave a speech to the population denouncing the Partisans. In the presence of German and Ustasha

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officers, Huska told the people of Cazin that he was the sole authority in the town.<sup>149</sup> Huska's militia was at this time disliked by the local Ustasha authorities as an 'exclusively Muslim military organisation' and a 'gang of plunderers' that was 'preventing the reestablishment of order in these parts'.<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, the Germans had reason to be satisfied with Huska, for the Partisans reported at the end of December that he had succeeded in turning the population of the Cazinska Krajina against them.<sup>151</sup> While the Ustasha authorities viewed 'the activities of Huska Miljković as hostile to our state', the Germans endeavoured to build up his authority in the region.<sup>152</sup>

Huska was a formidable opponent for the Partisans, not just because of his popularity among part of the population of the Cazinska Krajina, but also because he employed the Communists' methods of organisation. He established himself as its 'Supreme Commander' with a 'Supreme Staff' in mimicry of Tito, and organised his force along Partisan military lines, dividing it into brigades, battalions, companies, platoons and sections. The symbol adopted by Huska in place of the Partisan red star was the Islamic symbol of a star with a crescent moon, while the militia's slogan was 'Ready for the faith!', a variant on the Ustasas' 'Ready for the homeland!' The militia was supported by local commissioners, who fulfilled a role similar to the NOOs: they mobilised local manpower, collected food, weapons and other supplies for the militia, organised conferences to win and maintain popular support and in general maintained order behind the frontline. Huska even appealed to the region's Serbs in a manner similar to the Partisans, but on an anti-Communist basis, calling for a joint struggle of Serbs and Muslims against the Partisans and using the slogan 'Death to Communism—Freedom to the People!' His 'state' was underpinned by his intelligence service that infiltrated Partisan, Ustasha and Home Guard units and on occasion recruited their members for the militia. Some local Ustasha and Home Guard units supplied weapons to the militia, as elsewhere they did to the Partisans. Huska's wife Nedeljka Vergaš, a Serb from Croatia, also participated in the command of the militia and was well respected by the officers.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, Huska tried to avoid burning all his bridges with the Partisans and on at least one occasion complained to the Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps and other Partisan commands in the vicinity about the campaign being waged against him by the Communists of Cazinska Krajina.<sup>154</sup>

The Communists, for their part, suffered in relation to Huska from the fact that the Partisan units in the area were, despite their Croatian leadership, predominantly Serb and prone to plunder and chauvinism. Following the 7<sup>th</sup> Shock Division's brief occupation of Cazin and the vicinity, its Political Commissar reported to the Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps:

Our stay in the Cazin sector illustrates the poor political behaviour of our units and particularly the slack control of some of the leadership cadres over the units. Our units there made many errors, indeed a great many very serious ones. Several wholly innocent Muslims were killed and the plunder was merciless, particularly money and watches.<sup>155</sup>

The Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps then passed the following negative assessment to the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of Croatia:

The soldiers of our units are still prone to plunder, incorrect behaviour towards the local population and chauvinist hatred; Chetnik behaviour. Particularly serious errors of this kind



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were made by units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division in operations at Cazin. As a result of these errors, much damage will be done to our struggle and the behaviour of those units of ours has compromised the NOP in this region. After these operations, the position of Huska was strengthened while ours was weakened.<sup>156</sup>

With the Muslim majority hostile to the Partisans, the region of Cazinska Krajina was difficult to conquer militarily; the Communists sought instead to neutralise Huska politically.

Huska appears to have been aware that Germany was losing the war, and despite his victory over the Partisans in Cazin he immediately took steps to effect a reconciliation. He may have been influenced by the example of Muhamed Pandža's defection to the Partisans in November.<sup>157</sup> The intermediary he chose was a former comrade from his Partisan days, Jovica Lončar, now an officer of the Croatian Partisan 4<sup>th</sup> Corps. Lončar travelled to meet Huska from Partisan territory in Croatia; disguised as a Muslim peasant, he was able to pass through the Ustasha and Home Guard lines undetected. Lončar arranged for Huska a meeting with Veco Holjevac, Political Commissar of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps, and with Ilija Došen, a representative of the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Bosanska Krajina, on which occasion an alliance was struck between the parties.

In order to prove his commitment to the alliance, Huska had to perform a series of actions against the Partisans' enemies. The first was the disarming of about 100 Home Guards at Cazin, which Huska did not perform wholly satisfactorily, for he then immediately released the Home Guards and refused to turn their commander over to the Partisans, as the latter had requested. The second task was the elimination of Milan Bukva's Chetnik band, which Huska carried out ruthlessly. Pretending to fraternise with Bukva's entourage, Huska's men fell upon them and disarmed them, killing Bukva himself when he tried to escape. Huska's militia then attacked Bukva's band, killing or capturing about fifty of them. Finally, Huska arrested thirty German soldiers at the village of Brekovići, though once again he refused to turn them over to the Partisans, instead handing them in to the German command in an effort to avoid burning his bridges with the Germans.<sup>158</sup>

On the basis of these actions, Lončar and Holjevac met Huska once again and formalised their alliance with him. The transfer of the militia to the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps was negotiated in January by Huska and 4<sup>th</sup> Corps commander Ivo Rukavina. The militia was to become part of a new Una Operational Group together with the Partisan 7<sup>th</sup> Division and the Cazin Detachment. Huska's men were to continue to wear fezzes with their distinctive Islamic emblem. Huska's militia went over to the Partisans on 2 February 1944 and the new Una Operational Group was formally established on the 27<sup>th</sup> with Huska as commander and Bijedić as political commissar.<sup>159</sup> Yet, as Bijedić later recalled: 'Huska was pensive, frowning and stinting with his words. His bearing was haughty, as if we had gone over to him, not he to us.'<sup>160</sup> Indeed the sense that it was the Partisans who had surrendered to Huska, not vice versa, was widely felt among the population.<sup>161</sup> At the very time Huska went over to the Partisans, he had been negotiating simultaneously with the Ustasas to merge his forces into theirs;<sup>162</sup> his final decision in favour of the Partisans was made purely on the basis of political calculation. Nevertheless, Tito immediately endorsed the actions of the Croatian Partisans: 'I approve your agree-

ment with Huska, provided you commit sufficient commanding cadres, and particularly that you strengthen the staff with our dependable people. You must endeavour to give those units commanding people of the Muslim religion, and insofar as you do not have them, let the 5<sup>th</sup> [Bosnian] Corps give them.'<sup>163</sup>

Bijedić, the man selected to be Huska's leading partner from the Communist side, was a Muslim member of the KPH who had previously served in the Livno region, which was, like Cazinska Krajina, a Croatian-Bosnian borderland. He was part of the circle of Muslim Communists in Croatia that included the poet Skender Kulenović and spoke of the existence of a distinct Muslim nationality. In a speech at a meeting in Livno before the war, Bijedić had argued: 'The Muslims are by origin Croats or Serbs. Today they are an ethnic group or nation similar to those communities that arose historically.' This viewpoint earned Bijedić the disfavour of some Croatian Communists, who accused him of 'Muslim separatism'.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Bijedić's understanding of the Muslim national question made him suitable for the difficult role to which he was assigned in the Cazinska Krajina.

Huska's soldiers made strange Partisans, and the Communists among them were in the political sense very much an alien minority. Bijedić describes an early meeting with the militia:

Across the broad, trampled field the 'militia' was spread, armed with rifles, automatic weapons and machine guns, and dressed in diverse uniforms: German, Ustasha, Home Guard and combinations of all of these. On the breasts of many gleamed the insignia of various enemy decorations, earned in battle with the Partisans and Allies, and on the uniforms could be seen German, Ustasha or Home Guard officer or NCO ranks. On their caps some wore the Ustasha emblem 'U', others the Home Guard emblem, still others wore various German insignia and finally some wore once again the fez with the crescent moon and star. Some attached to their fezzes various brooches and some, beside the crescent moon and star, wore the Ustasha 'U' and the legionnaire's insignia. In short, that was a truly strange mosaic of an army; a fragmented one in which, beside honourable but misguided people, stood killers, house burners, bandits and Ustasha and German agents. Among these genuinely strange soldiers stood the Partisans with their three-horned caps and red five-pointed stars.<sup>165</sup>

The former militiamen tended almost immediately to remove the red stars pinned on them by the Communists and on one occasion a group of them, some wearing Ustasha insignia, almost attacked a Muslim Partisan who refused to take off his hammer-and-sickle badge.<sup>166</sup>

The Muslim population of Cazinska Krajina identified itself on the basis of religion and region rather than country. In this context, the proclamation issued by the Una Operational Group soon after its formation emphasised its purely Muslim character rather than the multinational character of the Partisans as a whole. The proclamation, issued in the name of Huska as commander and of Bijedić as political commissar, denounced the Germans for arming the Chetniks and inciting them to attack Muslim homes. In the name of 'We Muslims of Bosanska Krajina', it stated that 'we have founded our Muslim division in which are exclusively Muslim fighters'. It promised that 'in a federated Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Muslims will have rights equal to the Serbs and Croats and will be guaranteed full religious freedom and economic and cultural development'. Con-

sequently, 'every honourable Muslim who loves freedom and their home town should find their place in the Muslim units of the People's Liberation Army'. It urged 'Brother Muslims!' to 'turn your guns against the ENEMIES OF THE FAITH: the Krauts, Chetniks and Ustashes', and to 'join the struggle against the Germans, Ustashes and Chetniks—and for the freedom of the Muslim people'. [emphasis in original].<sup>167</sup>

Another of Huska's proclamations, issued soon afterwards, accused the Germans of arming the Chetniks and planning to send their Muslim collaborators to the Eastern Front, leaving their homes undefended. This proclamation was addressed to the 'People of Krajina', and it was the locality of Cazinska Krajina to whose patriotism Huska appealed.<sup>168</sup> A third proclamation issued by Huska at this time appears, however, to represent a synthesis of Huska's Islamism and regionalism and the ideology of the Partisans; addressed to the 'Muslims of Krajina', it denounced the Germans as 'enemies of the faith' while proclaiming 'long live the armed brotherhood of Muslims, Serbs and Croats!'; 'Long live free Bosnia-Hercegovina!'; 'Long live democratic federative Yugoslavia!'<sup>169</sup> It appears to have been issued by the Communists in Huska's name.

The Germans and Ustashes were aware of Huska's intention to change allegiances and endeavoured to persuade him to remain in their camp. They held a dinner in his honour at the Cazin hotel in early December 1943, at which Huska solemnly assured them that he had no intention of betraying them. Hasan Miljković attended the second of Huska's meetings with the Partisan commanders and, despite his own prior collaboration with the Partisans, tried unsuccessfully to persuade Huska not to switch sides. On 28 January 1944 Vjekoslav Vrančić and Muhamed Alajbegović visited Huska on behalf of the Ustasha regime and attempted to persuade him to return to their fold, but once again without success; Vrančić in his memoirs blames the dominant influence over him of the Croatian Communists and of the British military mission under Fitzroy Maclean and Randolph Churchill.<sup>170</sup> Yet Huska continued to flirt with the Ustashes and Germans. In February, he was reported by the Partisans to be holding talks with the German authorities in Prijedor on his own initiative.<sup>171</sup>

Immediately upon the formation of the Una Operational Group the Partisans formed within it the '1<sup>st</sup> Muslim Brigade', to be followed by a '2<sup>nd</sup> Muslim Brigade' on 2 March and a 'Krajina Detachment' later that month. At the end of March, the Una Operational Group numbered 1,765 men, overwhelmingly Muslims.<sup>172</sup> This represented a considerably smaller number than Huska's original militia before its defection to the Partisans, but thenceforth the Communists generally succeeded in maintaining or increasing the level of the Una Operational Group's manpower. Nevertheless, its commander remained an autonomous and self-willed element within the Partisans; a political wild card. On the very day in which the first of these brigades was formed, Huska travelled to Cazin for a meeting with the Germans and Ustashes, during which he promised to bring his militia back over to them. The Ustashes feted Huska with celebrations involving feasting and drinking that went on into the night. The following day, several Ustasha officers accompanied by the local Gestapo chief turned up at the headquarters of the Una Operational Group and warmly greeted Huska in front of the Communist staff members, who were forced to hide their insignia from the unexpected guests.<sup>173</sup>

Huska did not go back over to the Ustashas, but he did try to retain the upper hand in his relations with the Communists and avoid a complete break with the other side. Several days following his agreement with the Ustashas, Huska assembled the Communist officers of the Una Operational Group and ordered them to remove their Partisan insignia and put on fezzes with the Islamic crescent and star: 'You have, understand, joined a Muslim army. You will therefore remove your Tito symbols and five-pointed stars. In future, you will wear fezzes with the moon and star. There are the fezzes; distribute them among yourselves. Have you understood me?' Bijedić then ordered the reluctant Communists to obey Huska's order. This allowed the Communists to play along with Huska's continued flirting with the Germans and Ustashas, a game in which the border between resistance and collaboration became increasingly blurred.

Several days following the first battle between the Una Operational Group and German-Ustasha forces on 29 February Huska, Bijedić and five other Partisans visited Cazin, where Huska once again negotiated the transfer of his forces to the Ustashas and the arrest of the Partisan officers among them, while the Partisans took the opportunity to meet with NOP agents in the town. On this occasion, the Partisans were recognised by two deserters from the militia who attacked them, but a group of Ustashas arrived on the scene and joined the fight on the Partisans' side, berating the two deserters for wrongly accusing the Partisans of being Partisans. The Partisans spent the night with the district superintendent and his wife, Sajto and Helena Dilić, both Partisan sympathisers. Helena also recognised the Partisans and scolded them for abandoning the resistance to join 'this army of plunderers'. Bijedić eventually admitted that 'We're all still Partisans!', whereupon the frightened woman sent her children to stay with a relative in case the Ustashas should attack her guests in the night. Neither she nor her husband nor her guests slept well, for 'at every loud bump we would all jump up'.<sup>174</sup>

Often at the Group Staff headquarters, a Partisan would pick up the telephone and find an Ustasha official on the other end of the line trying to reach Huska or one of his men. When the latter came to the telephone, he would talk and joke with the Ustasha and discuss their collaboration openly and in front of the Communists. Sometimes this worked to the Communists' advantage. On one occasion, an Ustasha intelligence officer whom the Partisans had been trying to arrest turned up in his chauffeur-driven car at the Group's staff to see Huska and, finding Bijedić wearing a fez, shook his hand, sat down and gave him a cigarette. As the two of them smoked together, the Ustasha officer asked Bijedić several questions, including the whereabouts of the Partisan officer Šukrija Bijedić, wholly unaware that he was talking to Bijedić, who eventually offered to take him to see Huska at the small town of Mala Kladuša. Bijedić and another Partisan climbed into the Ustasha's car behind him and were driven to Mala Kladuša, whereupon they pulled out their revolvers and arrested the dumbfounded man who, together with his chauffeur, was turned over to the Staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps. Probably in an effort to smooth over any ill feelings arising from this incident, Huska once again went with his Partisan staff members to Cazin where, under their gaze, he sat with German and Ustasha officers, drank to the health of Hitler and Pavelić, made various jokes at the expense of the Partisans and once again solemnly negotiated his return to their fold.<sup>175</sup>

Huska was nevertheless sincere in his wish to collaborate with the Partisans. His men initially looked upon the Communists with hostility and were unwilling to listen to their political speeches; on one occasion, a former militiaman tore up a copy of a Communist newspaper and threw it in Bijedić's face, to the approval of his fellows. But Huska had a paternal love for his men and encouraged them to listen to the Communists for the sake of their education. Bijedić recalls that when, during a meeting, Huska learnt that some of his men did not even know that the Allies were fighting the Germans in Italy, he sternly ordered them to pay attention to the Communists: 'You see how these Partisans know everything... You know absolutely nothing—shame on you!' Yet Huska viewed his alliance with the Partisans as an end in itself, one that would allow his fiefdom to escape the ravages of war, rather than as an alliance against the Germans and Ustasas, whose goodwill he continued to cultivate. As he said in a speech to his men following his agreement with the Partisans:

We peacefully and nicely protect our villages. We don't fight against anyone. We have reached an agreement with the Partisans and earlier with the Germans and Ustasas. Now nobody attacks us. That is my politics! I want to protect the Krajina, the people. Why should we be killed? For whom? The man of the Krajina need not join any army. None but his own. And this will stay where it is to defend our hearth!<sup>176</sup>

The Communists tolerated Huska's self-willed behaviour while they struggled to transform his former militia into a regular Partisan force. This was an uphill struggle, for the soldiers of the Group felt no hatred for the Ustasas or Germans and continued to fraternise and trade with them in the towns of Cazinska Krajina. Nevertheless, the Communists quietly infiltrated the rank and file. The political commissars slept and ate in the same quarters as the men, gradually acquiring a degree of acceptance and approval from the latter. The Communists meanwhile came up against a hard core of loyal Ustasas among Huska's men whom they were unable to purge because they enjoyed Huska's protection. The Group thus split politically between pro-Communist and pro-Ustasha factions, with Huska himself tenuously keeping the peace between them. The Communists therefore strove to neutralise their Ustasha opponents without an open confrontation. In early March 1944 the battalion of the pro-Ustasha Memaga Dautović was incorporated into the newly formed Bužim Detachment as a means of controlling him. In this manner, the Communists gradually acquired a degree of control over the Group and over Huska himself.

The Partisans pressurised Huska to collaborate in the arrest of two prominent Cazinska Krajina Ustasas on 11 March; on that occasion the district commissioner Sajto Dilić went over to the Partisans. Thus Huska gradually burned his bridges with the Germans and Ustasas, who deduced from the arrests that Huska was irrevocably aligned against them. They responded by attempting to organise a coup within the Group, using the sidelined Dautović, but the Communists struck first and after putting heavy pressure on the reluctant Huska persuaded him to permit Dautović's arrest and execution. Huska thereby severely damaged the morale of his men and earned the permanent enmity of Dautović's friends among them. Meanwhile, Huska obstructed the formation of NOOs as a threat to his authority and refused to rejoin the KPJ, ensuring the Communists

would continue to distrust him. The warlord of Cazinska Krajina thus found his political base shrinking beneath his feet, thanks to the hostility of both Communists and Ustashas.<sup>177</sup>

The Communists worked through the framework of Huska's fiefdom to rebuild their 'state' in Cazinska Krajina. During March they established an Okrug Committee of the KPH for the Cazinska Krajina, with District Committees for Cazin and Velika Kladuša, although at the time there were only twenty-nine Party members and forty-four members of SKOJ on the terrain. They struggled to establish NOOs, despite Huska's hostility and the unreliable character of some of the Council members selected, including at least one Gestapo agent who was later arrested. They organised meetings and rallies in the towns and villages under their control. Hamdija Pozderac, subsequently one of the dominant figures in the post-war Communist regime, was at this time made Secretary of the Okrug People's Liberation Committee for Cazinska Krajina.

In mid March 1944 the Partisans convened a conference of *hodjas* at Mala Kladuša to mobilise Islamic opinion behind them; thirty-four of these *hodjas* signed a proclamation in favour of the Partisans, quoting the Prophet Mohammed in support of the latter and the view that 'Our religion, exalted Islam, requires us to fight against the exterminators of freedom, the enemies of the faith, the Krauts, Chetniks and Ustashas. Those that give their lives in that holy struggle will be martyrs.' Furthermore:

As a matter of life and death, for the defence of Islam, to save our villages and towns, our children and orphans, it is the duty of every Muslim to follow the road of the common armed struggle together with our brother Serbs and Croats against the common enemies, the Krauts, Chetniks and Ustashas.<sup>178</sup>

By the end of March Bijedić could report that the Group's soldiers had accepted that they were Partisans and were regularly using the Partisan greeting 'Death to Fascism!' The various Ustasha, SS, Home Guard and legionnaire uniforms and insignia they had been dressed in had been replaced by Partisan garb. The political commissars had achieved acceptance and authority among the men and were no longer viewed as outsiders. Furthermore: 'Now it is no longer heard that the fighters say "that we went over to them, rather that they have joined the People's Liberation Army."' <sup>179</sup> During April, the Una Operational Group was involved for the first time in heavy fighting against the Germans and Ustashas, witnessed in person by Randolph Churchill, son of the British Prime Minister.<sup>180</sup>

The climax of the Ustasha-Communist conflict over control of Huska's forces occurred on 27 April 1944. A group of Ustasha sympathisers formerly close to the executed Dautović killed Huska along with his brother. Simultaneously, Haso Dizdarević, the commander of the Bužim Detachment, led a putsch against the Communists. The political commissar of the Detachment's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was murdered, while both Bijedić and the political commissar of the Detachment itself narrowly avoided the same fate. Several hundred soldiers deserted from the Una Operational Group, above all from Dautović's former battalion. Somewhat later another mutiny occurred, with the battalion commander Muhamed Dedić deserting with seventy men. This putsch was a Muslim version of the Chetnik putsches in East Bosnia in the spring of 1942. It was carried out at a time when the Muslim

units were militarily poor, indisciplined and prone to desertion, while Communist control was at its shakiest.<sup>181</sup> This time, however, the Partisans had built up a strong military and political presence in the Cazinska Krajina and the putsch failed. The General Staff of Croatia brought in additional Partisan forces from outside to restore order in the Una Operational Group and the Partisan hold on the region. The mutinous commanders Haso Dizdarević and Muhamed Dedić eventually brought their units back into the Group. Halil Šakanović was appointed as commander of the Group to replace Huska; he consolidated his authority by marrying Huska's widow Nedeljka, despite already having two wives.<sup>182</sup>

The Communists gradually built up their political influence in the Muslim units of the Una Operational Group through systematic political education of the rank and file. The military performance of the units slowly improved. At the end of May 1944 Bijedić reported that the Una Operational Group was inflicting serious damage on the enemy in battle, that the soldiers were beginning to respect the Partisan officers, and that they were beginning to accept the principle of 'brotherhood' toward Serbs and Croats, even though they still had little or no appreciation of 'anti-fascism' and many of them were still afraid of Communism.<sup>183</sup> At the start of June the secretary of the KPJ organisation in the Una Operational Group reported that the Party had achieved a degree of acceptance among the fighters: 'It is already possible to speak to the fighters about the meaning and role of the C[ommunist] P[arty], of which up till now it had not been possible to speak openly. Many already see in the Party the certain, sole saviour of the Muslims of Krajina.'<sup>184</sup> Military mobilisation thus preceded political indoctrination. Twenty-five delegates from the Cazinska Krajina under the leadership of Hamdija Pozderac participated in the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH in June-July 1944. At the end of July, Bijedić reported that although the Muslim troops were still reluctant to fight against the Ustashas, in whose ranks were many of their relatives and neighbours, they felt a genuine hatred for the Germans and Chetniks and a genuine interest in 'the decisions of ZAVNOBiH and the position of the Muslims in the new federal Yugoslavia'.<sup>185</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Muslim Brigades continued to fight bravely against the Germans and Ustashas, briefly liberating Cazin in August 1944. That month, a great Partisan rally was held at the village of Lučke, presided over by leading Communists from both Croatia and Bosanska Krajina. At this time, the Oblast Committee for Bosanska Krajina finally took over formal leadership of the region from the KPH, with the veteran Muslim Communist Hajro Kapetanović becoming Secretary of the Okrug Committee for Cazinska Krajina, though the KPH continued to provide the key organisational support. Nevertheless, it was the Bosnian patriotic character of the Partisan struggle that counted in the eyes of the soldiers. Bijedić reported in late August 1944 that the latter's political consciousness was rising and that during discussions with the political commissars 'the soldiers asked questions about the situation in China; why Japan did not dare to attack the USSR; whether Turkey would enter the war; and many were interested in the Tito-Šubašić Agreement, as well as in how Bosnia-Hercegovina would be organised and in the position of the Muslims within it, etc.' Bijedić also noted that 'brotherhood in our units is stronger by the day, and our soldiers every day regard as their friends those soldiers who fight alongside them, regardless of whether they



are Serbs or Croats'. The Muslim soldiers were also greatly heartened by Turkey's diplomatic break with Germany.<sup>186</sup> The Una Operational Group achieved a notable success on 14 October 1944 when they rescued eleven US airmen from capture by the Ustasas.<sup>187</sup>

The Group's manpower rose from 2,268 in late September to 2,818 a month later.<sup>188</sup> In November the Una Operational Group and 8<sup>th</sup> Shock Division liberated Cazin, which remained in Partisan hands for the rest of the war. By the end of December the Group's manpower had risen to 3,099, despite its battlefield losses.<sup>189</sup> During this period, Communist political education continued to stress 'the goal and line of the People's Liberation Struggle, the decisions of AVNOJ and ZAVNOBiH, the position of the Muslims in the former Yugoslavia and the NDH and of the position they would have in the future Yugoslavia...'<sup>190</sup> Yet despite its predominantly Muslim character, the Group was a genuinely multinational force and on the eve of its dissolution in February 1945 it included in its ranks Serbs, Croats, Jews, Russians, an Italian and a Montenegrin.<sup>191</sup>

The incorporation of Cazinska Krajina into the Partisan state was completed in February 1945 when the best part of the Una Operational Group was reorganised as a single '3<sup>rd</sup> Muslim Brigade' within the 8<sup>th</sup> Shock Division. This move was carried out only after the Croatian Partisans had ascertained that the Partisan political position in the Cazinska Krajina was strong enough to permit the dissolution of the Una Operational Group and the transfer of its soldiers out of the region.<sup>192</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Muslim Brigade then participated in the remaining battles against the enemy, while the rest of the troops were organised as a single Krajina Detachment, which was to remain in the Cazinska Krajina and the vicinity. On 23 March 1945 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Muslim Brigade participated in the final liberation of Bihać and was awarded the honorary title of 'Shock Brigade', though its commander, deputy commander, political commissar and deputy political commissar were all killed during the battle or in those that followed. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Muslim Brigade then fought on through Croatia towards Zagreb. The Cazinska Krajina remained until the end of the war under the effective control of the Croatian Communists who took decisions on its administration in consultation with the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>193</sup>

## THE LIBERATION OF BOSNIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

c. APRIL 1944–APRIL 1945

*Sarajevo awaits the Partisans, to heal it of the enemy wounds*

Slogan of the Staff of the 38<sup>th</sup> Shock Division, March 1945, calling on the rank and file to behave correctly toward the Sarajevo population.<sup>1</sup>

The final year of the war, from the spring of 1944 to the spring of 1945, witnessed the culmination of the People's Liberation Struggle in Bosnia and Yugoslavia as the German and Ustasha collapse dovetailed with the maximum extent of popular participation in the resistance. The joint Soviet-Partisan liberation of eastern Yugoslavia—above all Serbia—in the autumn of 1944 enabled the Partisans to shift from guerrilla to regular warfare and establish a regular Yugoslav Army that would liberate Bosnia and the rest of western Yugoslavia by May 1945. Yet this was only possible in conjunction with the flowering of the underground NOP. Its years of agitation and propaganda bore full fruit as large parts of the quisling forces—Home Guards, Domdo legionnaires, Green Forces, SS troops of the Handschar Division, Chetniks and even some Ustashes—went over to the Partisans, filling the ranks of the latter and delivering into their hands towns and strongholds across the country. This was at once the work of the urban underground movement within them and of the Partisan units attacking from without; a case of both revolution and conquest. It is highly unlikely that the Partisan military could have won the war had it not been assisted by the underground NOP, which undermined the quisling forces from within and induced their defection; at the very least, such a 'liberation' would have assumed the form of a war of extermination against a large section of the Bosnian—in particular, non-Serb—population.

As it was, the Partisan victory in Bosnia involved a genuine popular revolution, one that embraced politically and socially diverse elements. It was catalysed by the ever more drastic collapse of state and society in the NDH: popular awareness of

impending German and Ustasha catastrophe; Allied air strikes; severe food shortages and general deprivation; escalating Ustasha terror; and German collaboration with the Chetniks. These factors increased popular receptivity to the Bosnian-patriotic, anti-fascist and anti-Chetnik agitation of the expanding NOP, which penetrated all areas of life in Bosnia and the NDH. The revolutionary process culminated in the successful liberation of the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, on 6 April 1945.

### *The Independent State of Croatia crumbles*

The military forces of the NDH began to collapse more rapidly during late 1943 and 1944, under the impact of military defeat, low morale, popular hatred of the Ustasha regime and Partisan infiltration and propaganda. Even where the Muslim and Croat inhabitants of an area did not support the Partisans, they might still leave the Home Guard to defend their villages from possible attackers, whether Partisan, Chetnik or other, something that accelerated the NDH's military dissolution.<sup>2</sup> An awareness of impending defeat began to spread even among the Ustasas. There were wild rumours among the Ustasas in the autumn of 1943 of an alleged agreement between Tito and Pavelić for the formation of an all-Croat government, in which Pavelić would remain Poglavnik, Tito would become Minister for War and Vladko Maček would become Prime Minister. Some Ustasas began to recognise the need for an agreement with the Partisans in order to rescue Croatia from defeat alongside Germany, a tendency that was encouraged by the brutality of the Axis forces towards Croat civilians in this period.<sup>3</sup> The Germans, for their part, began increasingly to view even their own Croatian quisling troops as Partisans in waiting, ready to defect at the first opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

The increasing frequency of Allied bombing of Croatian and Bosnian territory also served to highlight to the population the way the wind was blowing and further discredit the Ustasha regime. As the Command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Gendarme Regiment reported on 10 November 1943: 'The ever more frequent flying over of Anglo-American aeroplanes, which in recent times have also fired upon the undefended population; the strengthening of Partisan action; and the appearance of armed Chetniks in places inhabited exclusively by our population are at the root of the fact that the attitude of the Croat part of the population towards the state and its Supreme Authority is not at an adequate level'.<sup>5</sup> The same source reported on 25 November: 'In recent times, from when the Anglo-American aeroplanes began their action on our territory, there has been felt a certain disaffection and depression among this part of the population too, for the consequences of their actions are extremely heavy and bitter. In alliance with their actions, Partisan action on the terrain is every day assuming broader dimensions'.<sup>6</sup> Although the Allied air raids frequently killed and wounded civilians, something that tended to reduce popular sympathy for the Allies, this did nothing to increase popular confidence in the Ustasha regime. Furthermore, as Partisan support among non-Serbs grew, Croat and Muslim civilians increasingly came under fire from their 'own' Ustasha and Home Guard forces.<sup>7</sup> This not only destroyed lingering public support for the NDH but also, undoubtedly, encouraged the desertion of members of its armed forces.

NDH morale, and what was left of Muslim and Croat confidence in the NDH, were increasingly damaged by continued German collaboration with Great Serb

## THE LIBERATION OF BOSNIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

forces and rumours as to where this was leading. According to an Ustasha police report of 14 March 1944, the Chetniks had succeeded in cleansing large areas of East Bosnia and establishing their control; they held the strategically important town of Višegrad as a key element in their plan to annex East Bosnia to Serbia; the NDH had essentially disappeared in these areas; and the Germans were largely satisfied with the situation and with the Chetniks as their collaborators.<sup>8</sup> In early June 1944 the UNS reported from Goražde in East Bosnia that the bitterness among the local Muslim population towards the Chetniks and their German collaborators 'could be co-opted by the Partisans, who could succeed in taking advantage of this situation to take with them the entire male population, even though up till now from the territory of these district *oblasts* [*sic*] there have been no Muslims in the Partisans'.<sup>9</sup>

In May 1944 Hitler and Neubacher once again met to discuss the formation of a Great Serbian Federation. Neubacher apparently favoured the eventual transfer to Serbia, in addition to Montenegro and the Sanjak, of eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina up to the River Bosna. Nedić had earlier that spring threatened to resign unless his demands for the annexation of Montenegro and the Sanjak were met. Hitler consistently rejected such proposals, but Nedić nevertheless claimed during interrogation by the Communists after the war that on account of his worsening military position, Hitler would eventually have approved the formation of a Great Serbia.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet conquest of Serbia in the autumn of 1944 made all such plans redundant, while the terminal decline of the Chetnik movement was greatly accelerated by the radio broadcast on 12 September of the exiled King Petar, given under British pressure, in which he ordered all Chetniks to put themselves under the command of the People's Liberation Army. This weakened the standing of the Chetnik leaders and induced large-scale defections of their troops to the Partisans. Even before this, sixteen Chetniks from the Zenica Chetnik Detachment were alleged to have defected to the Partisans at the start of June in response to the King's alleged turn towards Tito.<sup>11</sup> Still, the increasing receptivity of the Germans towards the Serb anti-Communists meant a corresponding increased receptivity of the Muslims and Croats and of the members of their quisling forces towards the NOP. The director of Workers' Insurance in Sarajevo, Mustafa Hodžić, was reported in October 1944 as viewing the Partisans as the only salvation from the Great Serb threat:

The Serbs are without doubt the enemies of the Catholic Croats, as of the Muslim Croats. In order to defend ourselves from the Serbs it is necessary, to save our lives, for all true friends of this nation to unite and to establish contact with the Partisans, particularly the Muslim part of the Partisans. That alone would save us from a Great Serb massacre.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, high-ranking Germans felt a barely concealed contempt for Croatia and the Croats. On 22 August 1944 Hitler stated his views on the Croatian and Serbian questions to a meeting of the appropriate German leaders comprising Neubacher, the Wehrmacht Chief of Supreme Command Wilhelm Keitel, the Wehrmacht Chief of Operations Alfred Jodl, the Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Commander-in-Chief in South-East Europe Maximilian von Weichs and General Walter Warlimont. In Hitler's opinion, the Croats 'had no idea of statehood and will never have one', since the nation 'that has been five hundred

years without it, will never be able to develop into a state'. Consequently, Germany would eventually have to 'incorporate Croatia into the Reich or to make of it a protectorate'. Reliance on the Ustasha regime was therefore an alliance of the moment. By contrast, 'the Serbs are a nation that is ordained to have a state and that has, as a nation, succeeded in surviving', but 'they will always uphold the Great Serb idea' and 'that which comes from Belgrade means danger'. Consequently, any attempt to restore Serbian statehood within the Reich framework would only destabilise the Ustasha regime. Nevertheless, Hitler approved tactical collaboration at the local level with the Chetniks. On 18 September, at his last meeting with Pavelić, Hitler stressed to the Ustasha leader the need for collaboration with the Chetniks.<sup>13</sup> This shift in Hitler's standpoint was, in all likelihood, the result of Home Guard readiness to collaborate with the NOP.

Dissident Ustasha elements headed by Mladen Lorković and Ante Vokić attempted to carry out a coup in Zagreb in August 1944 in order to move the NDH out of the Axis camp and onto the side of the Allies. Pavelić suppressed the coup, but its repercussions helped to further weaken the Ustasha position in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Dissident Home Guards and HSS elements attempted unsuccessfully to bring the Handschar Division onto the side of the putschists, while a Home Guard commander carried out a temporarily successful local coup in Brčko in support of the latter.<sup>14</sup> Tito added to the psychological pressure on the quisling forces with his 'Last Appeal to all Deceived Minions of the Occupiers' of 30 August. He warned all Home Guards and Chetniks who were still fighting against the Partisans that if they continued to do so after 15 September, they would be 'brought before a military court and tried as traitors to the people and sentenced to the harshest sentence'.<sup>15</sup> This was for shock purposes only: Tito was ready to be more lenient to late defectors from the Home Guard than this statement suggests, and on the day the deadline expired he instructed his subordinates to continue to accept the latter on the same basis.<sup>16</sup> German military sources confirm that this ultimatum succeeded in catalysing the collapse of the NDH armed forces.<sup>17</sup> A UNS report noted in October: 'On the occasion of Tito's known proclamation to the Home Guard, plenty of Muslim officers and Home Guards have up till now fled into the forest.' The report attributed this to the effects of anti-Muslim discrimination in the Home Guard: 'Not one of them, according to this understanding, went out of conviction or because he was a Communist, but solely because, in the Croatian Home Guard, he was discriminated against and persecuted.'<sup>18</sup>

The Muslim autonomists in this period continued with their own quieter resistance to the Ustasha regime. On 28–29 April 1944, during his visit to Sarajevo, the NDH Prime Minister Nikola Mandić received a delegation of Muslim notables who wished to complain about Ustasha policies; above all about the Ustasas' killing of individual Muslims, their incarceration in concentration camps and the lack of significant Muslim participation in the organs of the state. The delegates were Zaim Šarac, whose son Džemil was a Communist; Šefkija Behmen, formerly number two in the JMO; Hamdija Kreševljaković, a leading member of the former National Salvation; Asim Ugljen, president of the Supreme Court; Hifzija Gavrankapetanović, vice-president of the Croatian State Parliament; and Ismetbeg Gavrankapetanović, a member of parliament. The memorandum deliv-

ered by this group stated that 'on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina there have for centuries lived members of different religions, and there can only be practised here a policy of mutual tolerance', demanding 'equality for all, justice for all and legality before all else'. It condemned the Ustasha massacre of Muslims at Srebrenica, the deportation of thousands of Muslims to concentration camps and the mass executions of Muslims carried out by the occupiers and warned that in consequence, 'among the Muslim population, there reigns a belief that in certain circles, a system is being set up and implemented that is leading to the extermination of the Muslims...'<sup>19</sup> This group of Muslim notables thereupon grew to form an informal lobby representing the Muslim population before the Ustasha regime.<sup>20</sup> Following this mission, Behmen once again put out feelers to the NOP for possible collaboration, though nothing came of this.<sup>21</sup> He also at this time invited the Green Force leader Nešad Topčić, head of the most powerful remaining independent Muslim military force, to visit Sarajevo. In late May Ustasha forces were prevented by the Germans from entering Goražde in East Bosnia at the request of a local Muslim militia leader, who warned the Germans that he would otherwise consider them his enemies.<sup>22</sup>

The Muslim autonomists continued to seek the separation of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the NDH. In early May 1944 Topčić, accompanied by some former Handschar Division officers, visited Berlin, where he was rightly suspected by the Ustasas of requesting from the Germans the establishment of an autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>23</sup> Topčić then made two further visits to Berlin in June and November 1944 to lobby the Germans to this end.<sup>24</sup> Yet nothing came of this, and the situation of the Muslims remained desperate. The Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram* announced on 29 June that the Egyptian government had received news from several Bosnian Muslim sources, including El-Hidaje and the Young Muslims, that 'the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina were suffering the most terrible injustices, in the form of murder, destruction, oppression and persecution; all that is being carried out against the Muslims by several bands and military forces. Over 200,000 Muslims have been murdered, mostly women, children and old people.' Consequently, the Egyptian Foreign Office was raising the matter with the Allied leaders and the Red Cross.<sup>25</sup> In the same period, the Turkish newspaper *Yeni Sabah* reported that 'In recent years the Croatian Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, territories that once belonged to Turkey, were experiencing a series of the heaviest misfortunes', from various armed formations' attacks to Allied bombing. The newspaper announced that Bosnians resident in Turkey had organised a successful campaign to raise money in Turkey for the Bosnian Muslims.<sup>26</sup> In July 1944 the regime in Zagreb passed two anti-Islamic measures, de-recognising the authority of Sharia law in questions related to mixed marriages and banning Christian conversion to Islam in northern Croatia. These measures shocked Muslim opinion in the NDH.<sup>27</sup>

Mehmed Handžić, president of El-Hidaje and author of the Sarajevo Muslim Resolution of 1941 against Ustasha policy, unexpectedly died at the age of thirty-eight on 29 July 1944 following a routine operation at the Koševo Hospital in Sarajevo. It has been suggested that this was an assassination carried out by the Communists, which, given the NOP's infiltration of the Sarajevo medical profession, is not impossible.<sup>28</sup> Whether by accident or assassination, the most powerful

opponent of both the Partisans and the Ustashas among the Muslim autonomists thereby left the historical stage. Following the death of Uzeir-aga Hadžihasanović the previous year, the Muslim autonomists were now left without any leaders of prime stature; the Partisans were rapidly becoming the only credible Muslim resistance movement above the regional level.

## *Liberating the towns from without and within*

The revolution in Tuzla in autumn 1943 involved the collapse of the NDH authorities and armed forces; the defection of large numbers of notables, NDH officials and former quisling troops of all nationalities to the NOP; and the establishment of Partisan government in the city with the support of part of its population. This set a pattern that was to be repeated across Bosnia in varying degrees in the months that followed. Other Bosnian towns, like Tuzla, were liberated through a combination of external Partisan military assault and internal NOP infiltration, with the NDH's forces induced to surrender or defect to the Partisans. This was in part the result of prolonged agitation on the part of the underground NOP, but was also a response to the quickening collapse of the NDH order, escalating German and Ustasha brutality against Croats and Muslims, German collaboration with the Chetniks and Allied bombardment of Bosnian towns. All this helped drive home to many Croats and Muslims that there was no future for them in the Axis camp.

The north-central Bosnian town of Teslić was captured by the Partisan 11<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division for the second time on 9 July 1944, after four previous failed Partisan attempts. This occurred in the context of a bitter power struggle between Teslić's Croat-dominated administration and the town's Muslim *čaršija*, and of active NOP agitation among the Teslić Home Guard, something that had prompted a UNS agent in late June to recommend the relocation of the latter and their replacement with more reliable forces.<sup>29</sup> The Partisan assault was assisted by a Domdo commander and his militia, who, on the basis of an agreement with them, opened a town gate to allow the Partisans entry and assisted them in disarming the Home Guard garrison. In the words of a UNS report: 'Like the first, the second fall of Teslić did not occur through surprise nor through force of arms but through treason, which was prepared according to a plan.' According to one hostile Home Guard source, the Partisans then executed seventeen Home Guards and ten Teslić citizens and forcibly conscripted other Home Guards.<sup>30</sup> A large number of the Muslim militiamen joined the Partisans at this time.<sup>31</sup> Teslić was captured for the third time on 4 September; following this, about fifty members of the local Muslim militia joined the Tešanj-Teslić Detachment, which was thereupon promoted to become the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Bosnian Brigade.<sup>32</sup>

Next door to Teslić, the town of Tešanj was liberated in July 1944 thanks to the town's NOP organisation, the collaboration of Home Guard elements and the skill of the command of the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade. Tešanj was the birthplace of the Doglavnik Ademaga Mešić and had never previously been taken by the Partisans. It had been attacked unsuccessfully in January 1943 by the 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Brigade and on three occasions during the course of the next year various Partisan units tried and failed to capture the town. In this context, the staff of the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat



Brigade concentrated on planning the capture of the fortress, alleged to have been part-Roman and part-Ottoman in construction and to have withstood the assault of Eugene of Savoy during the Vienna War of 1683–99. Their plan was based upon the NOP organisation within the town and among its defenders. Tešanj and its fortress were held by a German and Home Guard garrison. Among the Home Guards and the local population were numerous sympathisers of the NOP.

The staff of the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade received from the Tešanj KPJ organisation the locations of all enemy bunkers and strongholds in the town. At midnight on 22–23 July the brigade's commander Franjo Herljević and the leader of its KPJ organisation Moni Finci met the Tešanj Home Guard Lieutenant Slavko Kovačević, a personal acquaintance of Herljević's, to discuss the handing over of Tešanj to the Partisans. Herljević, Finci and a column of their Partisans were then quietly led by local NOP agents into the town without attracting undue attention. A Partisan platoon dressed in Home Guard uniforms approached the gates of the fortress while Lieutenant Kovačević informed the sentries that it was he. At this point, NOP agents within the fortress disarmed and silenced the sentries. The Partisans poured through the open gates of the fortress. With the assistance of NOP agents within the fortress they systematically disarmed the unprepared Home Guard garrison and closed in on the 'Broken Tower' that housed the sleeping German soldiers. The latter were woken up by the Partisans' call upon them to surrender. The machine guns of the 'Broken Tower' then opened fire on other positions held by the Germans, whereupon the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade launched a general attack on the town. At 1 o'clock in the morning of 23 July, Tešanj was in Partisan hands for the first time. Following their victory, the Partisans held a meeting before the captured Home Guard garrison, after which part of the latter was incorporated into the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade and the Posavina-Trebava Detachment, while the rest were allowed to return to their homes.<sup>33</sup>

A UNS report commented on these events: 'On the night of 22–23 July, the town of Tešanj fell into Partisan hands with the help of the treachery of our officers.' The report concluded: 'It is known that 98 per cent of the citizens of Tešanj sympathise with the Partisans, and that the Muslims in that area rejoice at Stalin's victories, hoping that he will found for them a Bosnian republic, in which all power will be held by the Muslims.'<sup>34</sup> According to a second report, the fall of Teslić and Tešanj indicated an organised Muslim rebellion against the NDH:

The fall of Teslić and Tešanj, like the raid on Derventa, indicates that this is a question of a broadly founded organised *čaršija*, which stretches across the whole of Bosanska Posavina, and probably encompasses also Gračanica, Modriča, Odžak, Šamac, Gradačac, Brčko, Bijeljina with Tuzla. In this area the state can have complete confidence exclusively in conscious Croat Catholics...

The report also claimed that the Partisans in Tešanj executed twenty or thirty Home Guards who were unwilling to join them.<sup>35</sup>

The NOP achieved another success in subverting the Home Guard garrisons of the towns of Doboj and Derventa in north-central Bosnia. The initiative to capture the towns, with the assistance of the NOP agents in the garrisons, was taken after the Home Guard defeated the first Partisan attack on Derventa in June 1944. Thereupon, members of the Derventa KPJ discussed with the staff of the

Partisan 53<sup>rd</sup> Central Bosnian Division the possibility of inducing the Derventa garrison to defect.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile in Doboj the garrison commander Colonel Asim Tanović was an NOP supporter; he and other Home Guards within the garrison supplied the Partisans with military information and supplies and allowed wounded Partisans, posing as Chetniks, to be nursed in the Home Guard hospital under the terms of the Chetnik–Ustasha agreement of spring 1942. The NOP's preparations reached fruition in the autumn of 1944, by which time the Ustasha state was crumbling across Central Bosnia. On 1 September 1944 eighteen officers and 250 soldiers of the 13<sup>th</sup> Zagreb Cavalry Regiment—Croats from Croatia stationed in the city of Travnik—defected to the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division. In the town of Gornji Vakuf the Home Guard Captain Kumf, an NOP sympathiser, arranged a fake Partisan attack, whereupon he defected to the 10<sup>th</sup> Division with another two officers and 270 troops of the Zagreb Cavalry Regiment.<sup>37</sup>

On 8 September 1944 the 53<sup>rd</sup> Central Bosnian Division planned to seize Doboj and Derventa through a military attack launched in conjunction with the planned surrender of the Home Guard garrison; the Partisans outside Doboj were to call out to the garrison: 'The Partisans are here—don't shoot, Home Guards.' The staff of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division met Colonel Tanović and the Home Guard commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery Complex, Colonel Slavko Telarević, on 6 September, at a rendezvous organised by Partisan intelligence officers. Unfortunately for the Partisans, the Germans had replaced some of the Home Guards with more reliable forces prior to the attack: the 4<sup>th</sup> Hunting Regiment, whose commander was a sworn enemy of the Partisans. Nevertheless, the NOP agents in Doboj succeeded in winning over Colonel Škrinjarić, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, whose defection was to play a key role in the Partisan success. Furthermore, Partisans wearing Home Guard uniforms infiltrated key points of the town's defences prior to the attack, giving the attacking forces a further edge.

Although the Home Guard units loyal to the Germans inflicted serious losses on the Partisans during the attack on Doboj, the surrender of part of the garrison enabled the Partisans to seize most of the town before being forced to retreat. On this occasion, an entire artillery division of the 1<sup>st</sup> Home Guard Hunting Group surrendered to the Partisans with all their artillery, which was then turned upon the remaining enemy outposts to aid the Partisan advance. According to the report of the Ustasha Major Matković, who recaptured the town from the Partisans: 'The Partisans would not have attempted to carry out the attack on Doboj had the betrayal not already been prepared by the Home Guard officers. The same officers betrayed and to a great measure surrendered the Home Guard to the Partisans.'<sup>38</sup>

Over a thousand Home Guards retreated from Doboj alongside the Partisans, bearing their artillery, ammunition and other military hardware; the Home Guards were then incorporated into Partisan units or allowed to return home. Meanwhile during the simultaneous Partisan attack on Derventa, the entire 6<sup>th</sup> Hunting Regiment of the Home Guard under its commander Colonel Muzlović defected to the Partisans, so that in total about 2,000 Home Guards went over to the Partisans during the attack on the two towns. A total of about seventy German soldiers, including a general, were captured in Derventa in the process.<sup>39</sup> The initiative for the Home Guards' change in side came from individual officers rather than the rank and file; the disarming of the Germans began, on the Home Guard officers'

## THE LIBERATION OF BOSNIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

orders, a couple of hours before the Partisans even arrived in the town.<sup>40</sup> The *tabornik* of the Ustasha Youth in Derventa, a certain Jozić, also worked for the Partisans during the operation, providing them with the positions of the Ustasha forces and eventually defecting to them. Other prominent Partisan sympathisers in the town included the former mayor of the Derventa municipality, Sadudin Hodžić.<sup>41</sup> As one eyewitness later recalled:

The attack by the forces of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division on Doboj and Derventa, which was carried out on 8 September 1944, was a complete success. Besides all else, such a great success owed itself in large part to the broad and well organised network of our collaborators and sympathisers who were active throughout the war in Doboj and its surroundings.<sup>42</sup>

According to a German police report of 12 September: 'In Doboj, the Home Guard did not carry out a single German order for action. Here, too, links with the bandits have been confirmed.'<sup>43</sup> There were at the same time, however, reports that the Partisans burned Croat villages during their attack on Derventa.<sup>44</sup>

Simultaneous to the attack on Doboj and Derventa was a Partisan attack on the town of Prijedor in north-west Bosnia, where the NOP possessed a broad web of sympathisers.<sup>45</sup> The 2,000-strong Home Guard garrison of Prijedor, thoroughly penetrated by the NOP and on the basis of an agreement with the Partisans, surrendered to them without a struggle, something that Đuro Pucar, political secretary of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina, attributed to Tito's nationwide appeal to the Home Guard. Part of the Prijedor citizenry, in particular Serbs and Muslims, assisted the Partisan attack by firing upon the defending forces. In the same period, five hundred armed Home Guards defected to the Partisans at Bosanski Petrovac and were immediately recruited into the 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division.<sup>46</sup>

The pattern of Partisan advances, Home Guard defection and NDH collapse continued in the months that followed. In October 1944 Karlo Baumgertl, commander of the Home Guard battalion at Ripač near Bihać, defected with his entire battalion to the Partisans.<sup>47</sup> At every step the Partisans strove to reassure the civilian population of their good intentions to ensure that the capture of a town or village would not result in the exodus of its civilians. Thus, for example, in October 1944 when the Partisan 13<sup>th</sup> Herzegovinian Brigade moved to capture the Croat village of Ravno in Herzegovina, Communists inside the village agitated to persuade the village's population to remain in the village rather than flee. Under this influence, about half the village's population remained to await the Partisans. A 'People's Liberation Committee', established by Ravno's native Communists, thereupon negotiated the 13<sup>th</sup> Herzegovinian Brigade's peaceful entry into the village.<sup>48</sup>

The Ustasas' response to increasingly widespread popular collaboration with the Partisans was ever more severe repression against the Bosnian population. On 20 September 1944 the 1<sup>st</sup> Ustasha Brigade hanged seventeen citizens of Bosanska Dubica, mostly Muslims and Croats, before the town mosque. They included a gendarme sergeant, an Ustasha, an industrial magnate, three teenagers and an elderly woman of eighty.<sup>49</sup> Yet the Ustasas could never be sure just who was still loyal. On one occasion two Partisan tanks were saved by enemy confusion over who was on which side. Surrounded by NDH forces around Travnik in October

1944, the two tanks from the 7<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade joined the enemy ranks; already dressed in Home Guard uniforms, they removed the red stars from their caps. As the NDH forces advanced against the Partisans, the two tanks chose an appropriate moment and rejoined the latter.<sup>50</sup>

The dual strategy for liberating the towns, combining underground infiltration, agitation and propaganda with external military action by the Partisan army, was not without its tensions. KPJ organisations and their NOP networks in each town were subject to local pressures and influences coming from their members, the local population and their collaborators among the quislings. These could not always be reconciled easily with the higher bodies' need for an all-Bosnian and all-Yugoslav strategy; trust was sometimes lacking and interests could appear to diverge. Thus, for example, the town of Gračanica in north-east Bosnia was liberated by the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade in September 1944, but on this occasion the efforts of local Communists to build links with non-Communist elements backfired. Although several prominent citizens of Gračanica went over to the NOP outright on this occasion, including Sejdo Đulić, former commander of the Gračanica Muslim legion, and Salih Arnautović, commander of the Muslim legion in the village of Brijesnici, senior Communists felt that the Gračanica Communists had gone too far in the direction of collaboration. The Gračanica Communists were accused of 'opportunism', of self-will and of a readiness to compromise with the Green Forces; their negotiations with the Green Force leader Pjanić earlier in the year were brought up. The Oblast Committee for East Bosnia dissolved the Gračanica KPJ organisation and this was not renewed prior to the Partisan withdrawal from the town.<sup>51</sup>

Tuzla was something of a dead town following its recapture by the Germans on 10 November 1943. In addition to those who had been mobilised into the Partisans, thousands of civilians had fled the city as the latter retreated and those that remained lived in fear of the Ustasas. The NDH's Chief Directorate for Public Order and Security reported that following the recapture of Tuzla, 'a gradual calming of spirits, that were under terrible pressure from the thirty-nine-day daily tyranny of the Partisans, can already be felt'. The report estimated that the Partisans had succeeded in 'erasing overnight every feeling of duty and respect towards the Independent State of Croatia, its leadership and the contemporary order on the part of approximately every fifth Croat', so that out of a combined population for Tuzla and Kreka of about 24,000, roughly 4,000 evacuated the town with the Partisans.<sup>52</sup> Under the restored Ustasha regime, Tuzla was a ghost of its former self, depopulated and subject to intense repression, though the Ustasas, learning from their Communist opponents, attempted to avoid excesses, even offering money rewards to deserters from the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade.<sup>53</sup>

The KPJ organisation in Tuzla remained, though greatly weakened. In the backlash following the Partisan defeat, the new Partisan units suffered large-scale desertions, particularly among the non-Serbs newly recruited from quisling units: the Srebrenica and Kalinovik Detachments collapsed; the Tuzla Detachment was reduced to a fraction of its former size; and the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade also suffered heavily from desertions. Even some high-ranking Communists went over to the enemy in this period, including Ferdinand Mesing, Secretary of the Okrug Committee for Tuzla and Fridah Šmit, a member of the Okrug Committee. A number

of Communist collaborators abandoned the Partisans during and after the Sixth Enemy Offensive, largely in response to the hardship of life in the forests and mountains, and returned to live under the Ustasas in Tuzla. These included ZAVNOBiH members Ljubomir Peleš and Simo Eraković, who were subsequently accepted back into the NOP, despite certain misgivings, and Muhamed Gagić, Partisan Local Commander in Srebrenik. HSS members Aleksandar Preka and Ante Kamenjašević likewise returned but were hounded out of the city by the Ustasas and forced to flee to Zagreb, where Kamenjašević, a veteran of the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War, was killed.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, the NOP in Tuzla survived. Through his connection with Vujić, Vilović was able to survive these dark days. The new Local Committee under Niso Arnaut comprised four women and it made particular use of new recruits from among the young Muslim women of the town, who attracted less suspicion from the authorities. By the summer of 1944 NOP agents were increasingly entering the city from outside. The Tuzla SKOJ built links with Muslim SS troops in the city, helping to arrange their eventual defection to the Partisans.<sup>55</sup> However, when the Partisans poised to recapture Tuzla in mid September, both Ustasas and Communists closed ranks out of fear of the consequences. On 14 September Vujić wrote to Kosta Nađ, Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, pleading with him not to enter the city on the grounds that the Germans would retaliate by bombing it and then turning it over to the Chetniks. Vujić persuaded the Tuzla KPJ organisation of the reality of this danger and he travelled with it to the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps in an effort to dissuade it from attacking. Yet their pleas fell on deaf ears. Tuzla was liberated for the second time on 17 September 1944 when the Muslim SS forces defending it abandoned their positions.<sup>56</sup> Vujić negotiated frantically with Vilović and with the Chetniks and Green Forces right up to the Partisans' reentry into the town, but this did not save him.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding his protection of the Tuzla NOP, he was executed by the Partisans and the Tuzla KPJ organisation was heavily rebuked for their collaboration with him and for other errors, as a result of which it was disbanded.<sup>58</sup> The town—conquered rather than liberated—remained in Partisan hands until the end of the war, forming the largest enclave of unoccupied territory behind German lines. The Partisans inherited the assets, institutions and staff of the NDH institutions in the town and mobilised a new militia from the ranks of the former Muslim legion.<sup>59</sup> *Plus ça change...*

## *The battle for Banja Luka*

Banja Luka was a key city in Bosnia-Herzegovina both for the Germans and Ustasas on the one hand and for the Partisans on the other. It was Bosnia-Herzegovina's second city, and occupied from the Bosnian and Croatian perspective a more strategic position than Sarajevo. It had played what was probably a more important role in spawning the Partisan movement than any other Bosnian city, but it was likewise the most important base for German and Ustasha counter-insurgency operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Partisans failed to liberate Banja Luka completely until April 1945, so that the city remained throughout the war an enemy base in the Partisan heartland. As such, it was the object of particular attentions from both sides.

## THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Communists built the Banja Luka NOP from both inside and outside the city. Their task was made more difficult by the fact that the hinterland of Banja Luka to the south and east was essentially Chetnik territory, which obstructed Partisan communications. The Chetnik offensive against the Partisans in the spring of 1942 had received wide support among the Serb population around Banja Luka and succeeded in breaking communications between the city's NOP and the Partisans outside.<sup>60</sup> These were only reestablished in the second half of 1943 and remained tenuous thereafter. On 28 May 1944 two Partisan couriers carrying communications between the Banja Luka NOP and Partisan territory were caught and killed by the Chetniks. On the other hand, Chetnik-Ustasha collaboration did allow Partisans dressed as Chetniks to enter the city to spy on the Ustasas.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the increasingly open collaboration between the Germans and Chetniks and the increasing German preference for the Chetniks over the Home Guards served to increase Muslim and Croat discontent with the existing order in Banja Luka.<sup>62</sup>

To the north and west of Banja Luka was the region of Kozara, a Partisan bastion whose Communists provided major assistance to the Communists of Banja Luka. In August 1943 an Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Banja Luka was formed outside the city, while from within Banja Luka Communists worked with their sympathisers among the Home Guards to collect military supplies and information about enemy forces in the city and transmit them to the Staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, with which they were in contact by radio. When the Staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps launched its first unsuccessful attempt to capture the city during the end of December and beginning of January it possessed detailed information on enemy positions and numbers, while on this occasion about 1,800 Home Guards surrendered to the Partisans without a struggle. Nevertheless, the Partisan attack failed and the Germans and Ustasas responded with an increase of terror against the city's population, burning down the houses even of innocent citizens. About fifty leading NOP activists left Banja Luka with the retreating Partisans in January, causing a corresponding fall in resistance activity in the city. A curfew was introduced; German tanks roamed the streets, and those suspected of collaborating with the NOP were dragged from their homes and executed. The NOP responded with bomb attacks on Ustasha and German military targets.<sup>63</sup>

Two Home Guard pilots deserted with their planes to the Partisans at the end of March 1944. On 29 May the Allies bombed Banja Luka, causing many Home Guards to abandon their positions in panic; the Germans responded by executing twenty-six Home Guards and Banja Luka citizens in an effort to restore discipline.<sup>64</sup> On this occasion the Partisans' old foe, the Chetnik commander Uroš Drenović, was killed in the bombardment. In light of Banja Luka's importance, in March 1944 the Central Committee of the KPJ itself selected Anđa Knežević to be Secretary of the Local Committee for Banja Luka and prepared her to lead resistance activities in the city. She was transported into Banja Luka the following month in a Home Guard lorry, carrying identification papers obtained for her by the Banja Luka NOP from the city authorities. Under her leadership the NOP established a force of underground fighters in the city for the purpose of fifth-column action in support of an external attack by the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps.

During the summer of 1944 Allied air strikes forced the Germans and Ustasas to relocate their staffs and military units to a large extent outside the city, particu-

larly during the day. This weakened their ability to monitor and resist NOP activity inside the city. One line of such activity was the recruitment of supporters among the city elite of all nationalities; the NOP attempted to recruit Suljaha Salihagić, one of the probable authors of the Muslim Memorandum to Hitler of November 1942, and transport him to Partisan territory, although Salihagić refused to cooperate. More successful was the NOP infiltration of the NDH military and bureaucracy. In this period, the NOP stole a large quantity of flour from a Home Guard store and a batch of promissory notes worth ten million kunas from the Office of the Great Župa of Sana and Luka; both were delivered into the hands of the NOP by Home Guard lorries. On the eve of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps' second offensive to liberate Banja Luka in early September 1944, Knežević provided its staff with a detailed plan of the city's defences including information on all Home Guards who had agreed not to resist the Partisans.<sup>65</sup>

The autumn of 1944 saw what was effectively the final collapse of the Ustasha state in Bosanska Krajina, with the Partisan seizure of the towns of Donji Vakuf, Bugojno, Prijedor, Blagaj, Jajce, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, Tešanj, Teslić and Travnik. Of the major towns in the region, only Bihać, Bosanski Novi and Banja Luka would remain in Ustasha and German hands until the last six weeks of the war. The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps nevertheless mounted on 18 September its second offensive to seize Banja Luka, initiating a battle that raged until the 29<sup>th</sup>. The attack was planned in coordination with friendly units of the Home Guard 3<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Group, which were supposed to be defending the city but instead put themselves under the Partisans' command prior to the attack and which fought on their side during the operation.<sup>66</sup> On the eve of the offensive the nearby settlement of Ivanjska was handed over to the Partisans on the 15<sup>th</sup> by its Home Guard defenders, who went over to the Partisans at this time.<sup>67</sup> Home Guard aeroplanes, too, fought on the Partisan side.<sup>68</sup> On this occasion, Milan Miljuš and Milan Indić, the commander and political commissar of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade, met the crews of Home Guard tanks who had driven their armoured vehicles outside the city to arrange their defection to the Partisans; Miljuš and Indić were then transported into the city in a Home Guard tank, in a successful attempt to arrange the defection of several tanks to the Partisans.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to prior agreements with the city's NOP, entire Home Guard units surrendered to the Partisans without a struggle, enabling the latter to penetrate rapidly to the city centre. One Home Guard officer handed over twenty-six cannon to the Partisans who immediately turned them against the Ustashes and Germans. Meanwhile, at the airport, Home Guard officers readily turned over their aeroplanes and fuel. Knežević herself led three Home Guard tanks to the Ustasha trenches where they opened fire on the Ustashes.

The Partisans, assisted by sections of the Home Guard, succeeded in three days in capturing the entire town except the fortress, where the enemy garrison was holed up, then in defending the town for a week against German counterattacks. They retreated with a huge captured military booty, which included thirty aeroplanes, twenty-five cannon, fifty mortars, over 300 machine guns, sixty armoured cars, eight locomotives, eighty railway carriages and enormous quantities of munitions, bombs, petrol and food.<sup>70</sup> About 1,600 Banja Luka Home Guards joined the Partisans during the battle and several thousand citizens of Banja Luka left the city



with the retreating Partisans.<sup>71</sup> Since this exodus included a large portion of the NDH officials in the city, the city government restored by the Ustashes after the battle was crippled.<sup>72</sup> Among those who had collaborated with the Partisans during their stay in the city were the former mayor Rifat-beg Džinić, the professor Derviš Taftro and the sharia law judge Muhamed Maglajlić.<sup>73</sup> This second Banja Luka operation represented a heavy blow to the NDH, but it was the last significant triumph of the city's NOP. Ustasha terror intensified massively following the battle. At the start of December the Ustashes carried out arrests of NOP sympathisers and Home Guards, effectively destroying the NOP in Banja Luka until the end of the war. When the Partisans finally liberated Banja Luka on 21–22 April 1945 they inherited a decimated town with a population cowed by terror.

## *The collapse of the Handschar Division*

The 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division 'Handschar' was the toughest Bosnian quisling military unit, initially superior militarily to the Partisans in north-east Bosnia. Hence the subversion and collapse of the Handschar Division was a major event on the Partisan road to victory. This was the result of a number of factors: NOP agitation and propaganda; increasing resentment of the Germans and Ustashes among its troops; and the widespread unwillingness of the troops to serve outside Bosnia, as the Germans required them to do. But the defeat of the Handschar Division was a matter not just of ending its resistance to the Partisans, but of incorporating a considerable number of its former troops into the latter. This was part and parcel of the Partisan conquest of Bosnia. But it brought with it problems as well as opportunities.

Despite its successes against the Partisans following its appearance in north-east Bosnia in early 1944, the Handschar Division was unable to crush Partisan resistance in Birač or conquer south-east Bosnia. On 19 June a second Bosnian SS division, the 23<sup>rd</sup> SS Division 'Kama', was established by the Germans, but by September this had only two thousand troops. The Partisans' transfer of additional units from Central to East Bosnia allowed them to assume the offensive in September 1944 and liberate Zvornik, Kladanj, Živinice and Tuzla.<sup>74</sup> Zvornik was captured by Partisans disguised as Germans with the assistance of the local Muslim militia commander, Meho Arpađić, who allowed a small Partisan force to take the town without resistance.<sup>75</sup> By this time, the Handschar Division began to show signs of disintegration; in the period 1–20 September, 2,000 Bosnian troops deserted from it. Consequently, on 16 September the Division commanders proposed either dissolving the Division or stiffening it with German personnel to bring the German-Bosnian ratio within it up to 1:2.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the disintegration of the unit continued. The increase in support the Germans gave to the Chetniks, in particular the provision of arms to Chetnik bands that then used them to attack Muslim and Croat villages, helped discredit the Germans in the eyes of the Division's troops.<sup>77</sup> In the contemporary words of Muhidin Begić, who served in the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade: 'Under the blows and the pursuit of the fighters of the People's Liberation Army, the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division is collapsing, with segments of it turning on their own initiatives against their German officers and joining the People's Liberation Army.'<sup>78</sup> The final German withdrawal from Tuzla in September proved to be a catalyst for SS troops to join the Partisans; at this

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time, former SS troops comprised the largest component of new recruits to the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division.<sup>79</sup>

The collapse of the Handschar Division, as the flagship Muslim autonomist force, in turn catalysed the collapse of other Muslim quisling armed formations. In September the Partisans and Green Forces held negotiations in the vicinity of Vis in East Bosnia to discuss the possibility of the Green Forces' absorption into the Partisans. The Partisan delegation was headed by Abdusalem Basara, a former Domdo commander. While the Partisans demanded that the Green Forces be subsumed wholly within the Partisan military structure, the Green Force representatives rejected the idea of fighting outside of their localities or for Partisan military goals. They offered instead to act as a local Partisan militia that would remain in the area under its own commanders. This was unacceptable to the Partisans and the meeting ended unsuccessfully. Hostilities were thereupon resumed, but the Green Forces were increasingly unwilling fighters. When Partisan forces entered the town of Gradačac in East Bosnia in October, the Muslim militia defending it failed to offer any resistance.<sup>80</sup> Members of the Green Forces in this period were joining the Partisans more readily than former Chetniks. The Oblast NOO for East Bosnia reported on 23 November 1944:

It is necessary only to note that this process among the Chetniks is taking place more slowly, for, while the Green Forces lost support and perspective with the collapse of the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division, and are massively joining the P[eo]ple's L[iberation] Army in which they see the sole force [*sic*], the Chetnik leaders are still succeeding, by means of lies, in deceiving one part of the uninformed masses.<sup>81</sup>

On 15 December Partisans dressed as Home Guards entered Nešad Topčić's hotel room in Modriča, dragged him out and shot him dead. This effectively ended the Green Forces as a functioning army in Bosnia-Herzegovina, though in some localities they continued to resist the Partisans until the end of the war and beyond.<sup>82</sup>

An important role in the subversion of the Muslim quisling forces in East Bosnia was played by the Tuzla Detachment, a unit established on 24 October 1943 following the first liberation of Tuzla for the purpose of mobilising the former Domdo soldiers of the region who had gone over to the Partisans during the operation. With Omer Gluhić as commander and Meša Selimović, from December, as political commissar, it was initially six hundred strong. With no experienced Party organisation to secure the loyalty of its troops, it relied instead on a number of prominent local Muslims and Croats: Professor Nail Begić, headmaster of the Tuzla Citizens' School; Professor Muhamed Gajić, formerly commander of the Muslim militia of Moluke in Kreka; the lawyers Ivo Sunarić (of the HSS), Adem Osmanbegović and Vahid Begić; the veterinarian Muhamed Dusinović; the schoolteacher Salih Žilić; and the *kadi* Abdulah Mujezinović. Of particular weight was the fact that Gluhić, its commander, was a former commander of the Muslim militia. All these individuals were intended not only to keep the Detachment's soldiers loyal to the NOP but to win over the Muslim population of East Bosnia at large. The Tuzla Detachment's staff reported later: 'Composed mostly of mobilised manpower that had been in the Muslim legions with untried lower cadres, the Detachment was a fairly weak military unit of a politically mediocre level.' It rapidly crumbled in the face of the German counter-

offensive against Tuzla, falling through desertions to somewhat over a hundred troops. Nevertheless, the notables at its head remained loyal and in the long run proved politically invaluable to the Communists. Members of the Tuzla Detachment who deserted during the Sixth Enemy Offensive were largely reabsorbed into the former Domdo regiment, now organised as the Green Forces. For many of them this proved to be merely temporary.<sup>83</sup> Thanks to Gluhić's popularity and steadfastness, the core of the detachment was maintained at all times despite the heavy desertions.<sup>84</sup> It was therefore in a position to expand again when the tide turned in the Partisans' favour.

The Tuzla Detachment came into its own during the Partisans' final victorious offensives in East Bosnia from the summer of 1944. As the soldiers of the Handschar Division began to desert many of them joined the Tuzla Detachment; as a result this previously weak military unit acquired by the end of August 1944 the numbers, weapons and military capabilities to enable it to carry out independent military actions for the first time.<sup>85</sup> The desertions from the SS continued and on 12 September 1944 the Tuzla Detachment received the surrender of 120 fully armed soldiers of the Handschar Division, followed by 600 more the following day. These were rapidly incorporated into the Detachment, something that involved some difficulties, for:

among the older fighters in the Detachment there was a definite doubt and suspicion, particularly when it reached the point when there were in the Detachment more of 'them' than of 'us'. All problems were nevertheless relatively quickly overcome, and among the [former SS] fighters there grew a feeling of belonging to the NOP; of belief in the value and goals of the NOP and the revolution.<sup>86</sup>

In an interview published in *Front Slobode*, the newspaper of the East Bosnian People's Liberation Front in this period, Gluhić paid tribute to the former SS soldiers who had not been involved in war crimes and had joined the Partisans; he absolved them of blame and presented them as victims. The Handschar Division had, he said, been 'forcibly formed'; apart from a core of Ustasas and Albanian quislings, the mass of its soldiers had simply been 'ruthlessly mobilised'. All power in the Handschar Division had been held by the German officers; 'The Muslim fighter who was born here was cattle and a minion, while the German, parasite and foreigner, was master'. But now: 'Those members of the SS Division who were deceived or forcibly mobilised and who did not tarnish themselves, are today already in our ranks, happy and contented, for they have seen that this is the only place for them; they will themselves try the criminals for their acts.'<sup>87</sup>

On 19 September a new, 21<sup>st</sup> East Bosnian (Tuzla) Brigade was established; the Tuzla Detachment donated an entire battalion to the new unit, whose members were predominantly former SS troops.<sup>88</sup> Even after this donation, by the end of November 1944 the Tuzla Detachment was the strongest Partisan detachment in East Bosnia, with 457 troops. In March 1945 a total of about 1,000 members of the Green Forces declared their readiness to join the Tuzla Detachment as soon as it arrived on their territory.<sup>89</sup> The Tuzla Detachment was never a militarily effective unit, but it made a significant political contribution to the Partisan victory in East Bosnia through its mobilisation of former Muslim quisling soldiers.

The Tuzla Detachment also sought to appeal to the Croats, who were, of course, also present in the Handschar Division's ranks. Sunarić wrote an article in

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October 1944 for *Front Slobode*, entitled 'The Croats of Bosnia-Hercegovina in Brotherhood with the Serbs and Muslims.' He wrote that the population of 'Bosnia-Hercegovina, that beautiful and bounteous land' had in the interwar period been 'exposed to the selfish ambitions of first the Belgrade and then the Zagreb profit-mongers and parasites' and had 'felt without rights, that it was simply an object of exploitation and that its fundamental rights as people and as citizens were curtailed'. In interwar Yugoslavia, 'in Zagreb as in Belgrade it was deemed that Bosnia-Hercegovina was their pashalik and the people of that land currency for the settling of accounts'. This situation was not improved by the establishment of the NDH. Sunarić therefore argued: 'The only salvation for us Croats' is 'in the People's Liberation Movement, in the new federated Bosnia-Hercegovina, where we shall be able to develop freely in the educational, cultural and social fields, in pure Croat national spirit'.<sup>90</sup>

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> SS Divisions began to be redeployed in northern Croatia in October 1944 to resist the Soviet advance from Serbia. This move away from the Bosnian homeland brought about massive desertions among the troops. On 17 October, the day after the redeployment was ordered, the Bosnian troops of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division mutinied and the latter was thereupon dissolved. On 25 October, the Germans began to disarm the 13<sup>th</sup> Division, with 70 per cent of its Bosnian troops released from service. What remained was a smaller unit of equal numbers of Germans and Bosnians that followed other German units in retreat to Germany.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile hundreds of former SS soldiers joined the Partisans. As the Oblast NOO for East Bosnia reported in November: 'A particularly large number of members of the former 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division have surrendered with their entire armaments, for they did not want to carry out the orders of the Kraut officers to go to Hungary.'<sup>92</sup> In mid October 1944 a unit of 700 SS soldiers based at Orašje in north-east Bosnia surrendered to the 18<sup>th</sup> Croat Brigade. The SS soldiers arrived at the Partisan base, the Partisans prepared lunch and the two groups of soldiers ate together, after which the SS soldiers were distributed between the 17<sup>th</sup> Maje-vica and 21<sup>st</sup> Tuzla Brigades.<sup>93</sup> 700 defectors from the Handschar Division joined the Partisan 38<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division at the start of December and a further 300 troops, mostly former members of the Green Forces, were mobilised into the 38<sup>th</sup> Division in the course of the month. In the 38<sup>th</sup> Division in the same period, earlier defectors from the SS, now considered 'tried and well tested comrades', were appointed as NCOs.<sup>94</sup> Indeed the former SS soldiers were not only looked upon highly favourably within the 38<sup>th</sup> Division, but apparently assigned a privileged role: 'Comrades accepted from the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division are extremely good as comrades, they are in particular good soldiers and the majority of them are lower military leaders (corporals and sergeants).'<sup>95</sup> By late December the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for East Bosnia reported that a total of 2,000 troops from the Handschar Division had joined the Partisans.<sup>96</sup>

One Partisan recalls how a naive SS soldier joined the Partisans at the village of Mravići near Doboj:

Towards the road between Doboj and Maglaj, advance guards were situated. We were thus sitting one day in a small room belonging to the company command and relaxing. All at once a man entered the room. He was wearing a German uniform, on his shirt was an eagle, on his head a black fez and around his neck a Schmeiser. As he crossed the threshold

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he raised his hand and said 'Heil Hitler!' Not paying him much attention, I asked him 'What kind of Hitler have you found, man?' I thought some clown from our company had obtained the uniform and was playing a joke on us. I looked at him better and saw that he could not be a soldier from my company, so I asked him who he was. He replied as if out of the blue:

'I am an SS soldier!'

'Come on man, what do you mean an SS soldier?', I asked and he replied:

'I was and I have come to surrender'.

Only then did I realise what was happening and I asked him to give me his Schmeiser. He took it from around his neck, offered it to me and said:

'There, only don't kill me. I want to be with you, brother'.<sup>97</sup>

In December, the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps reported victory in the Partisan attempt to subvert the Handschar Division:

After several months of struggle with our units, the enemy 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division, that had been the main bastion of the occupiers in East Bosnia during this year, has totally collapsed. The majority of the fighters of this division, who deserted from it, have with their armaments joined our units. The correct stance that we took towards them enabled them to surrender to our forces.<sup>98</sup>

The influx of former SS troops into the Partisans meant on the one hand that the latter's political hold over the Muslim population was strengthened and the Partisan ranks stiffened through the influx of well trained troops, but that on the other the Partisans had to accommodate new members whose outlook and behaviour were not always as desired. The political commissar of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division reported in November that:

the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade [was] until recently the most solid, both politically and organisationally, but recently it has been slipping. The crack quality of the brigade has also been slipping, though it is already beginning to recover. The reason for this is the influx of more than half of the new troops from the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division and the Green Forces while the Brigade was present in the Tuzla sector...

The Party organisations in the Partisan units were simply too thinly stretched to train and indoctrinate all the new recruits. Yet, despite their alien political background, the former quislings were ready to fight as Partisans; the same source notes that 'among the new soldiers there are frequently demonstrated fine instances of self-sacrifice and skill in the handling of arms'; furthermore, 'there has been hardly a single case of desertion among the former SS troops'.<sup>99</sup> A report by the deputy political commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa People's Liberation Shock Brigade to the KPJ Central Committee of 5 December 1944 spoke of 'tried and well-tested comrades who two or three months ago deserted from the 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division', yet complained at the same time that deserters from the SS had brought with them 'rusty fascist habits' into the brigade.<sup>100</sup>

The former SS troops were unaccustomed to the Partisan style of guerrilla warfare; they proved indecisive during night-time attacks and feared enemy artillery fire of which they, unlike veteran Partisans, had no experience.<sup>101</sup> Partisans of

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longer standing continued to distrust the former SS soldiers. The latter sought to remain together and form their own units under their own commanders within the Partisans. But the Partisan commanders insisted on dividing them up between the existing units and redistributing their weapons among the troops on an equal basis. This encouraged desertions among the former SS troops but it also helped to normalise relations between those who remained and the original Partisans.<sup>102</sup> In January 1945 the deputy political commissar of the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigade noted that 'well tested comrades who came from the former 13<sup>th</sup> SS Division' and who were now in the SKOJ had distinguished themselves in combat.<sup>103</sup>

As with the former SS troops, so the defection of large numbers of other quislings to the Partisans was a great boon to them, but not an unmixed blessing. The influx of former SS soldiers, Home Guards and other quisling troops into the Partisans provided the latter with military expertise, trained troops and heavy weaponry, and the numbers were considerable: during September 1944 alone a total of 5,474 former quisling soldiers joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps.<sup>104</sup> The staff of the 39<sup>th</sup> Division reported in October: 'Fighters from the Home Guard units are, through combat, increasingly growing accustomed to our fighters, and a good number of Home Guard officers have acquitted themselves extremely well in combat; some of them are already standing out as excellent soldiers and leaders.'<sup>105</sup> But the value of these new recruits was variable. As with the former SS soldiers, the Partisan practice of dispersing former Home Guards between existing Partisan units, instead of allowing them to remain together, was unpopular with them and encouraged desertions.<sup>106</sup> The Staff of the 8<sup>th</sup> Krajina Brigade blamed the failure of its attack on an Ustasha base near Bosanska Krupa in mid November 1944 on the fact that a large part of its artillery was manned by former Home Guards lacking in morale.<sup>107</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division reported at the end of December 1944 that it had doubled over the previous three months thanks to the influx of about 3,500 former Home Guards and that the change in its composition had 'posed the question of brotherhood as the most important question'. The national character of the division had substantially altered; in some of its units, Serbs ceased to be in a majority; its artillery division now had a Croat plurality. There were consequently problems of mutual hostility between Serbs and non-Serbs; even between Muslims and Croats. While Partisans of longer standing were readier to look favourably upon Muslim recruits, thanks in part to the warm welcome they had been receiving from the Muslim population of Central Bosnia, they were often hostile to Croat recruits, tending to identify them as Ustashas; conversely, newer Muslim and Croat recruits suspected that the Partisans were essentially a Serb movement. The division's political department blamed this on a failure of political education on the part of Party members in the division, 'in the sense that they do not explain the plan of building our new state, in which our peoples, through the establishment of our federal unit, have already achieved full equality'.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was now more multinational than ever, containing equal numbers of Serbs and Muslims by March 1945, as well as a considerable number of Croats.<sup>109</sup>

The increasing defection of Home Guards and even some Ustashas to the Partisans did not go unnoticed among the Chetniks. The Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović wrote in the summer of 1944: 'The Ustashas are every day going over

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to the Partisans in greater numbers, and in all possible ways are helping the Partisans in the struggle against the Serbs.' Mihailović's reaction was increasingly to view the Partisans and Usthas as two wings of a single Croatian enemy, the 'Communist-Ustasha mafia of Josip Broz and Ante Pavelić', and to view the Chetnik struggle with the Partisans in anti-Croat terms. In this context, the Chetnik-Partisan struggle was in part a Serbo-Croat struggle for possession of Bosnia-Hercegovina:

The question of Bosnia is one of the extremely important questions. It is, as it seems to us on the basis of data from the other side, a complex problem, because the Croats will attempt with all their might to ensure that Bosnia goes to them. Consequently, we must take hold of it completely in our own hands.

On this basis, Mihailović issued an appeal to the 'Serb Partisans' at the start of September 1944 claiming that Partisan policy was 'to destroy the last territories on which any part of the Serb nation had survived even partly' and to 'rescue the Usthas and other Croat monsters from the catastrophes of their civil war', all this on the basis of 'the agreement which the two Croats, Dr Šubašić and Josip Broz-Tito, reached between themselves'. Mihailović therefore urged Serb Partisans to defect to the Chetniks, an appeal which, if his claims are to be believed, did not go unanswered among many Bosnian Serb Partisans.<sup>110</sup>

Chetnik propaganda made much of the supposedly 'Ustasha' character of the Partisans; according to a leaflet of the Bosnian Chetniks' Mountain Staff of this period:

Among our enemies fall the black and red Usthas—or, as they call themselves, Partisans-Communists. Both black and red Usthas are headed by Croats and Muslims. You yourselves know, so it is not surprising, that they burn, steal and kill precisely everything that is Serb and everything that is holy to the Serb people.<sup>111</sup>

Another Chetnik leaflet claimed:

Tito wants only the Serb people to suffer. That is his goal, not a struggle against the occupiers, which he engages in only when he is forced to. Now, when Tito's horde is attacking Serbia in order to destroy it, and when he has filled his ranks with Usthas and other traitors, who were until yesterday slaughtering our people, he has the audacity to try to weaken our ranks with some big-hearted amnesty to all those who go over to him and who betray their king and their people.<sup>112</sup>

The Chetnik newspaper *Srpska Zastava* ('Serbian Flag') noted that a Partisan captured by the Chetniks was found to be carrying Ustasha symbols: 'All that shows that the Usthas and the Partisans are one and the same and are aiming at the destruction of the Serb nation. Let nobody be deceived into thinking that Pavelić and Tito are not old and loyal allies.'<sup>113</sup>

An Oblast NOO for East Bosnia was finally elected on 5 September 1944, followed by Okrug NOOs for Birač and Romanija. Following the second and final liberation of Tuzla on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the Oblast NOO was transferred there. The last months of 1944 then witnessed the Partisans' definitive victory in East Bosnia, as the Germans began to retreat westward and the Chetniks and Green Forces finally collapsed. The Political Commissar of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division reported in early November: 'Political activity alongside the military has been



extremely lively, something best attested to by the mobilisation of fresh manpower—the doubling in size of our brigades. A particularly large number of Muslims has been mobilised.' This was achieved through the convening of mass meetings among both the Muslim and Serb communities. Yet as the Partisans conquered the East Bosnian Serbs and Muslims, so the latter colonised the Partisans. The same source noted that in the newly formed 20<sup>th</sup> Romanija Brigade, 'there are still a large number of soldiers who are very crude, illiterate, prone to errors and self-willed, particularly those who have recently joined from the ranks of the Chetniks and a number of Muslims from the vicinity of Tuzla'.<sup>114</sup>

Whereas throughout the war Serb Partisans had periodically been guilty of excesses against non-Serbs, and indeed against other Serbs, as the Muslim component in the Partisans became increasingly large and diverse instances of Muslim Partisan excesses against Serbs began to occur. In September 1945 Muslim Partisans of the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa Brigade were reported as having, in the course of operations against the remnants of the Chetniks, committed excesses against Serb civilians: 'Invading our homes, they abused women, children and the rest, cursing our Serb mothers and calling all of us Chetniks.' The civilians in question had apparently been collaborating with the Chetniks.<sup>115</sup> The Partisans behaved towards them as they might towards a conquered and hostile population. This occurred only a month after Partisans of the 10<sup>th</sup> Serbian Brigade had crossed the River Drina from Serbia into Bosnia and abused civilians in the Srebrenica District; the report did not indicate whether the victims were Serbs or Muslims.<sup>116</sup>

### *The liberation of Serbia*

By the start of 1944 the Partisans and Chetniks were at an impasse in their confrontation. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina formed the Partisan heartland, where the Chetniks had been the weaker side since the spring of 1943. Yet the key to Yugoslavia's political future lay in Serbia, possession of which would determine the outcome of the Yugoslav civil war. In Serbia following the capitulation of Italy, the Chetniks were still stronger than the Partisans, while the Wehrmacht remained in tight control of the country. Tito was consequently aware that a Partisan liberation of Serbia would have to come from without—from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. In March 1944 the Supreme Staff formed a Shock Group of divisions, consisting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian and 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina Divisions, for penetration into Serbia. This Shock Group twice attempted to enter Serbia during the spring of 1944 and was both times defeated; the second attempt also involved an attack on Serbia by forces of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bosnian Corps across the River Drina, which also failed. Nevertheless, during the spring and summer the Supreme Staff established the first five Serbian Partisan Divisions to support future attacks into Serbia. Tito now organised the 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian, 5<sup>th</sup> Krajina and 17<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Divisions into an Operational Group of divisions. In mid July an attempt by Vojvodinian and Croatian Partisan units to enter Serbia from south-east Bosnia was defeated, but later that month the Operational Group succeeded in penetrating into southern Serbia where it linked up with Serbian Partisan forces.

By the summer of 1944 Tito was massing his forces in south-east Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and the Sanjak for a decisive push into Serbia, while

the Germans, through vigorous counter-attacks, attempted to disperse his forces and keep them at bay. By the middle of September there were sixteen Partisan divisions engaged against the Germans in Serbia, of which six were native Serbian divisions, two more of which were formed by early October. Ranged against them were powerful German and quisling forces, including the core army of Mihailović's Chetniks. Following Bulgaria's surrender to the Red Army, the Bulgarian Army began to withdraw from Serbia, though not from Macedonia, at the end of August. The Partisans nevertheless were incapable of overcoming the German and Serbian quisling forces alone. Tito wrote to the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Serbia on 17 September, expressing his concern about the country:

In what lies the importance of Serbia in recent times, following the Second Session of AVNOJ? In the fact that in Serbia has gathered the central reactionary groups, linked to all reactionary groups in Yugoslavia, assisted by the reactionary circles of England and America and by the German occupiers. From such a position, it follows absolutely necessarily that all the reactionaries are speculating over the question of Serbia.<sup>117</sup>

Tito therefore departed his island base of Vis dramatically on 18 September in order to fly to Moscow, where he arrived on 21 September, to seek Soviet assistance. In Moscow he received Stalin's pledge of support for Red Army assistance in the liberation of Serbia. The Red Army entered Yugoslav territory on 22 September, liberating Belgrade, in conjunction with the Partisans, on 14–20 October. Following Tito's agreement with the Bulgarian government on 5 October, the Bulgarian Army assisted in the operations against the Germans.

A total of eighteen Partisan divisions participated in the liberation of Serbia, of which ten fought under the command of the Supreme Staff and eight under the General Staff of Serbia. Of the eighteen divisions, nine were native Serbian divisions, three of which were formed only during and after the start of the offensive and five only a few months previously. The ninth was the formally all-Yugoslav 2<sup>nd</sup> Proletarian Division, where the cream of the native Serbian Partisan forces were, however, concentrated, and which was therefore a predominantly Serbian unit. Nine divisions were from regions outside Serbia proper: three from Bosnia-Herzegovina, two from Croatia, two from Vojvodina and one from the Sanjak, the remaining one being the all-Yugoslav 1<sup>st</sup> Proletarian Division. All these units were in ethnic terms predominantly Serb and were probably chosen to participate in the operation for this reason (while the more substantially non-Serb Partisan units remained behind in western Yugoslavia). But in organisational terms, the Partisan units sent into Serbia from outside were under the political jurisdictions of the Bosnian, Croatian, Vojvodinian and Montenegrin Party organisations. Even leaving aside the central role of the Red Army and the assistance of the Bulgarian Army in the liberation of Serbia, the latter was primarily the work of the Partisan movement outside Serbia, in which the native Serbian Partisan movement played a distinctly subordinate role.<sup>118</sup>

Inasmuch as Serbia was liberated, it was also conquered by the Partisans, who used units from outside the country to overcome the native Chetnik and Nedićite forces. But the colonisation worked both ways, for just as the Partisans from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina and Montenegro imposed their rule on Serbia, so the Chetniks in Serbia defected *en masse* to the Partisans, giving rise to

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an unstable synthesis. As the Central Committee stated in January 1945 in a circular to subordinate Party bodies:

Hundreds of thousands of new fighters have entered the ranks of our army. Almost all our old units have grown rapidly, and many new ones have been formed. The manpower that has filled the ranks of our army is predominantly from regions (Serbia, Bačka, Banat, etc.) which until recently were not broadly encompassed by the People's Liberation Struggle, and partly from enemy military formations (Chetniks, Home Guards) which are collapsing. Living under enemy occupation, poisoned by treasonous propaganda, that manpower is politically extremely backward.<sup>119</sup>

In transforming from a volunteer to a conscript army, the People's Liberation Army now had an even greater need for intensive political education by Communist activists among the troops.

Tito and the Supreme Staff returned to Belgrade in triumph on 25 October 1944. This marked one of the turning points in the history of the birth of the Yugoslav state, for it was only at this point that this state began to develop an apparatus of its own. So long as the Yugoslav capital was held by the enemy, the central Yugoslav civilian state consisted only of the figurehead bodies of the Presidency of AVNOJ and the NKOJ, controlled by a Partisan leadership that in the months prior to the liberation of Serbia had not even been based in mainland Yugoslavia. Insofar as a Partisan civilian statehood existed, it was the statehood of the individual Yugoslav lands, rooted in their respective networks of NOOs. But with the liberation of Belgrade, the central Yugoslav state could at last begin to put down roots of its own; only then did the NKOJ acquire a proper bureaucracy.<sup>120</sup> Meanwhile, a second Tito-Šubašić Agreement, signed in Belgrade on 1 November, gave the final stamp of legitimacy to the Partisan takeover. Under the draft agreement, AVNOJ was to be the supreme legislative body of Yugoslavia and a united government was to be formed comprising twelve members of the NKOJ and six of the Royal government (and of these six, three were supporters or sympathisers of the NOP). Tito was to be Prime Minister and Šubašić Foreign Minister. In February 1945, on Allied prompting, AVNOJ was expanded to include delegates from the lands unrepresented at the Second Session: Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo-Metohija.

The liberation of Serbia had some unintended repercussions for the Partisans in East Bosnia, as anti-Communist Serbian forces poured into the region to escape the victorious Soviets and Partisans across the River Drina. A huge combined force of Serbian anti-Communist military formations began to invade Romanija in December 1944 with the approval of the Germans. It included units of Serbian Chetniks, Nedić's Serbian State Guard and Ljotić's Serbian Volunteer Corps which had retreated via the Sanjak from Serbia following the Soviet conquest. The force was under Chetnik command and numbered approximately 12,000. Pushing northward and driving back the Partisan 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian and 38<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Divisions, the Serbian column broke out of Romanija into the Tuzla basin and threatened Tuzla itself, whose capture Mihailović had ordered. The battle for Tuzla involved from the Partisan side a genuinely multinational resistance, involving the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim, 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa, 18<sup>th</sup> Croat, 19<sup>th</sup> Birač, 20<sup>th</sup> Romanija and 21<sup>st</sup> Tuzla Brigades and the Tuzla and Posavina-Trebava Detachments, supported and sup-

plied by the citizens of Tuzla and fighting under the slogan 'Tuzla must not fall'. To this defence the Partisans of Serbia proper made their contribution, through the 14<sup>th</sup> and part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Serbian Brigades. The fate of the city, from where the staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps directed the defence, hung in the balance on 24–26 December. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the 38<sup>th</sup> Bosnian Division launched a counteroffensive that broke the advance of the Serbian anti-Communists and sent them into full retreat.<sup>121</sup> To this victory former SS soldiers must have made a significant contribution.

### *The liberation of Mostar*

The city of Mostar, the regional capital of Hercegovina, was traditionally left-oriented, hostile to the Ustashes, and had been a bastion of support for the NOP at the start of the uprising in 1941. But since then Ustasha repression, the horrors of the Communist 'left errors' and the Chetnik reaction had all taken their toll and the NOP in Mostar had drastically declined. The Partisans' Mostar Battalion was disbanded following the Battle of the Sutjeska, while the Mostar Local Committee itself was totally paralysed by Ustasha repression and forced to disband. Nevertheless, the majority of Mostar's population remained strongly anti-Ustasha and pro-Ally.<sup>122</sup> The Mostar NOP continued to engage in acts of industrial sabotage, assassinations of prominent Ustashes and Chetniks and the collection of food, medical supplies and other goods for the Partisans, their families and supporters. The Mostar NOP's biggest contribution to the Partisans in this period was its raising of a series of 'people's loans', beginning in March 1943. These loans were raised from NOP supporters in Mostar, who received security in the form of banknotes that the director of Mostar's National Bank, Daniel Samokovlić, an NOP supporter, withdrew from circulation for this purpose. The first such loan amounted to 20,510,000 kunas.<sup>123</sup> In May 1944 there were several instances of Ustashes in the Mostar area collaborating with the NOP, including the defection of fifty-two of them to the Partisans.<sup>124</sup>

During 1944 the Mostar NOP's military organisation was gradually rebuilt, with a staff for every sector and a cell within the Home Guard garrison. From autumn onward the Oblast Committee of the KPJ for Hercegovina took a direct interest in organising the Mostar underground army as a key element in the eventual Partisan takeover of the city and on 4 September it sent a directive to the Mostar Local Committee with instructions on how to proceed. As a result, an underground 'Military Committee' was set up and forces under its command tasked with assisting a Partisan attack on the city and taking control of bridges, mines and other industrial assets from the occupier.<sup>125</sup> The Germans and Ustashes, meanwhile, became increasingly nervous about the Mostar resistance and in August murdered the Home Guard General Simić, fearing he was about to defect to the British.

At this stage, a disagreement occurred between the Oblast Committee for Hercegovina and the Local Committee for Mostar over the direction that underground activity should take: on 15 October the Oblast Committee sent a directive to the Local Committee, severely reprimanding it for 'opportunism'. Whereas the Local Committee wanted to build up a network of sympathisers in the Home Guard, through which the city could be seized eventually, the Oblast Committee wanted to recruit sympathetic Home Guards to bolster the Partisan ranks. At issue

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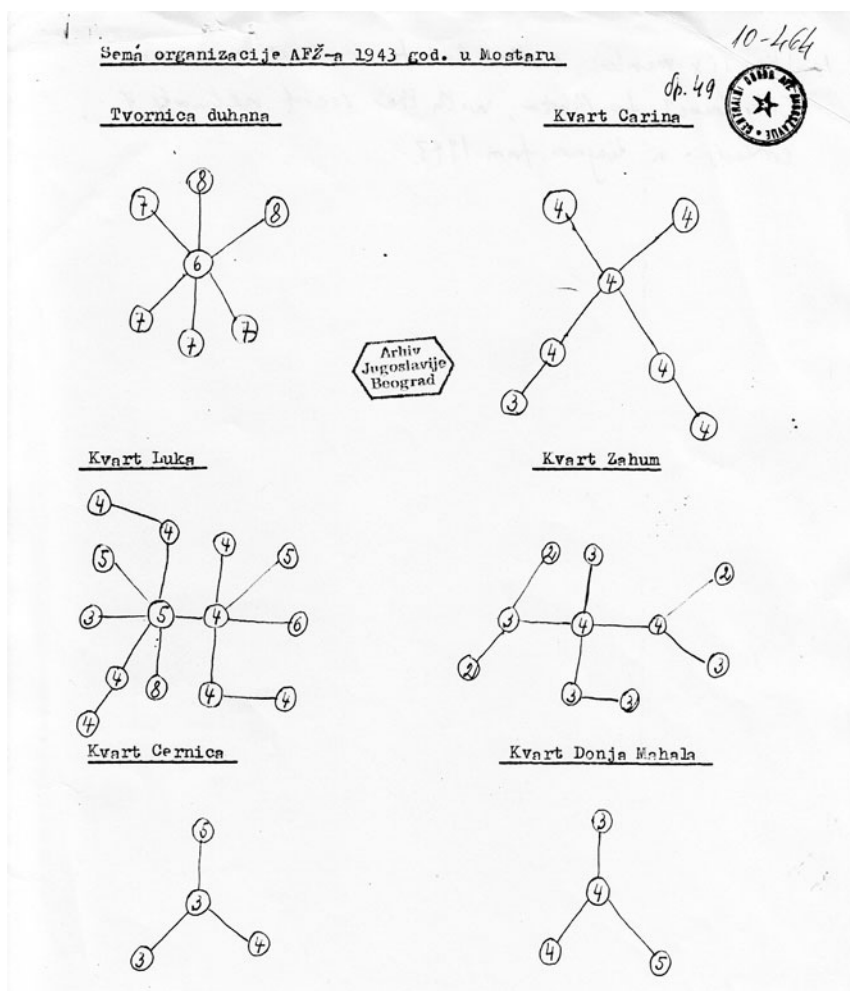


Image 2: The six members of the Antifascist Front of Women's City Council for Mostar, with their secret networks of contacts; a diagram from 1943.

was whether Mostar should be seized primarily by the political actions of its own underground or serve primarily as a resource for the Partisans and be seized by the military actions of the external Partisan army. With the massive increase in conventional military strength of the Partisans the Bosnian Communist leadership had largely lost interest in local revolutionary action and lacked confidence in the ability of the Mostar underground to exercise sufficient control over Home Guard units to deliver the city according to plan. Furthermore, the Bosnian Communist leadership wished to increase the number of former Home Guards in Partisan ranks in order to create a more favourable impression among the Home Guards

across the whole country. National needs were therefore to override local needs, though in the process, the 'from below' character of the revolution was lost.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of 1944 Mostar's underground NOO met and drew up a plan to seize power in the city in the event of its liberation.

The final liberation of Hercegovina began in the autumn of 1944: on 1 September the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division liberated the town of Gacko, which thereafter remained in Partisan hands for the rest of the war. There, an Oblast People's Liberation Assembly and Oblast NOO were elected for Hercegovina on 17–18 September, followed by an Oblast Council for the People's Liberation Front on the 19<sup>th</sup>. More than in any other part of Bosnia-Hercegovina, however, the Partisan reconquest of Hercegovina was waged against the Chetniks. Following the liberation of Kalinovik on the 25<sup>th</sup> the Partisans liberated the Chetnik stronghold of Bileća on 2 October, and following a series of battles with the Chetniks they liberated Trebinje on 4 October. During the second half of October the Hercegovinian Partisans liberated a large part of central and eastern Hercegovina and the adjacent areas of Dalmatia, including the towns of Grude, Dubrovnik, Stolac, Metković, Gabela, Čapljina and Herceg-Novi. The Partisans held mass rallies in the liberated towns in which they preached the goals and ideals of the NOP. In Stolac and at Čapljina, in particular, they reported attracting large numbers of Serbs, Muslims and Croats to these rallies—an apparent confirmation of the improvement in inter-ethnic relations that they had brought about.<sup>127</sup>

The Partisans' victorious advance slowed over the winter of 1944–45, thanks to the arrival in the region of retreating Chetniks from Serbia and the German reinforcement of Mostar, which Hitler was not prepared to surrender without a struggle. In late January 1945 a German offensive from Mostar and western Hercegovina drove the Partisans back and recaptured several towns. Yet on 30 January the Supreme Staff ordered the 8<sup>th</sup> Dalmatian Corps to liberate the Hercegovinian capital. The 8<sup>th</sup> Corps was part of the People's Liberation Army of Croatia and was a force made up predominantly of ethnic Croats which facilitated the political conquest of western Hercegovina, a territory that was predominantly Croat and largely pro-Ustasha. As one Partisan veteran, a former officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> Split Shock Brigade of the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps recalls: 'The national composition of the Brigade was over 87 per cent Croat, which was of fundamental importance for this region.'<sup>128</sup> As the Partisans advanced they held rallies at which they propagated the political message of the NOP and arranged discussions with the locals. As one Partisan officer reported at the time: 'The people accepted the arrival of our brigades on this terrain extremely well, not perhaps as the People's Liberation Army, but as Croats, Catholics who had come to replace the Hercegovinian brigade as a Serb brigade.' The Croatian Partisans therefore made propaganda on behalf of the predominantly Serb Hercegovinian units, and on behalf of the principle of brotherhood and unity between Serbs and Croats, in order to reconcile the population to its new rulers.<sup>129</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> Corps drove the Germans from Široki Brijeg, in the Ustasha heartland of western Hercegovina, on 7 February after heavy fighting. One of the ironies of this battle was that while the Partisans had 'almost exact information on the enemy, received from numerous informers and sympathisers in Mostar, even in the units of the NDH', at the same time 'the enemy in Široki Brijeg, through its

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intelligence organs and its numerous sympathisers on our free territory, had almost exact information on the arrival of our units, the position of the staffs, and even of our intentions', as one Partisan veteran of the battle recalls.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the Partisans prevailed. Finally on 13 February, the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps launched its offensive to capture Mostar. The town of Nevesinje, a Chetnik bastion, was taken by the Partisans on the night of 13–14 February, and following a day-long battle on the 14 March Mostar was liberated.

The underground NOP in Mostar made a major contribution to the success of the operation. Informants provided the Partisans with detailed and accurate information on the location and character of enemy troops, minefields, bunkers and the like. The underground NOP carried out a successful sabotage of the railway system, preventing the enemy from evacuating a large part of its armaments, which consequently fell into Partisan hands. The NOP also took successful action to prevent the enemy's destruction of bridges and other industrial assets and attacked and captured German and NDH troops as the Partisans entered the city. The Partisans crossed from the left to the right bank of Mostar over a bridge that the Germans had mined. The underground NOP had successfully sabotaged the explosives; a team of activists led by Grgo Papac, dressed in a Home Guard officer's uniform, removed the explosives from under the bridge, while others cut the electric cables through which the Germans had intended to detonate them. Crowds cheered as the Partisans crossed safely; the German commander committed suicide.<sup>131</sup> On 20 February a mass rally was held in Mostar to celebrate its liberation, addressed by leading Partisans, including Avdo Humo, who stated that 'Mostar is liberated and will remain free forever', and Vlado Šegrt, who said: 'We Hercegovinians can, with full justice, say that our dear Mostar is among the first cities of our new Yugoslavia'.<sup>132</sup> Two or three days following the liberation about twenty members of Mostar's Roma community joined the Partisans and fought in their ranks for the remainder of the war.<sup>133</sup> In total about 500 new volunteers from Mostar joined the Partisans following the rally.<sup>134</sup> The liberation of Mostar was followed during the next three weeks by the liberation of Jablanica, Konjic and the rest of Hercegovina.

A final catalyst to the Muslim population's rejection of the Axis-Ustasha order and transfer of support to the NOP occurred in February 1945 with Turkey's entry into the war on the side of the Allies. The Sanski Most District NOO reported in March:

The feeling of the people towards our Allies remains extremely good, and from the time that Turkey agreed to declare war on the fascist countries there can be felt among the Muslim masses a liveliness, and one can notice that they are discussing this a lot, something that definitely needs to be made use of among the Muslim masses, for this is a trump on the basis of which it will be possible to harness even the most backward Muslim masses for the NOP.<sup>135</sup>

### *Sarajevo on the eve of liberation*

The capital city of Bosnia-Hercegovina was a very different place in mid 1943 from what it had been at the start of the war. The once large and thriving Jewish community had vanished. Tens of thousands of Sarajevans were mobilised in the



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NDH's armed forces, fighting with the Partisans, working in Germany and occupied Europe and interned in concentration camps. Their place was taken by a mass of Muslim refugees who had fled Chetnik terror in eastern Bosnia-Hercegovina, the Sanjak and Montenegro. Consequently, despite the extermination of the Jews, the city's population grew from about 90,000 to 115,000 during the war. The refugees were housed in squalid refugee camps in and around the Bosnian capital. As one eyewitness recalls: 'Children without parents, parents without children, the elderly, the wounded and the hungry, forced from the devastated villages and towns of East Bosnia, fleeing from the bloody criminals' knives and fires in which human meat roasted.'<sup>136</sup> In the words of another:

The refugees who reached Sarajevo were housed in ruins and half-built barns, in huts that were assigned as accommodation, in abandoned student homes as well as in meagre rooms in private homes. A large number of children of these refugees were often housed outside Sarajevo, so that children were separated from parents. As well as general insecurity, dearth and hunger, the height of misfortune though which these unfortunates passed was the epidemics of various diseases...<sup>137</sup>

Towards the end of 1944 the city began to fill also with Yugoslav and Albanian civilians fleeing the Partisan advances.

Hunger was not limited to refugees; its extent can be gauged by a comparison of the rations received by Sarajevans in the first nine months of 1943 with British estimates of those of the rest of the NDH and of Belgrade in the spring of the same year.

Real weekly rations in grams per capita distributed by the State Food Agency to Sarajevans, January-October 1943 and British estimates of official rations for occupied NDH and Belgrade, spring 1943.

	<i>Bread</i>	<i>Flour</i>	<i>Meat</i>	<i>Fats</i>	<i>Oil</i>	<i>Sugar</i>	<i>Cheese</i>	<i>Pulses</i>	<i>Macaroni</i>	<i>Butter</i>	<i>Potatoes</i>
Belgrade	2,240*	1,470*	125	80	30	150	—	—	—	—	—
Sarajevo	—	795	—	—	—	65	—	—	7	2.4	675
NDH	1050	75	250	60	50	75	100	115	—	—	—

\*Ration of either bread or flour.

Rations were delivered in a relatively regular way in Serbia, much less so in the NDH, where the real ration was much lower than the official ration. The latter was already, according to Jozo Tomasevich, the lowest of any European country in World War II.<sup>138</sup> This naturally produced extreme discontent among the population of Sarajevo. Even in an institution as essential to the regime as Sarajevo's Home Guard Military-Technical Institute, 'great discontent and bitterness reign among the workers, who have not received any material aid such as that received by other officials and among the materially worst off', so that 'some have already abandoned work and those that remain are of no value, for their work is surrounded by sabotage at every step', according to a UNS report of September 1943.<sup>139</sup>

Conditions continued to decline after the autumn of 1943. The Sarajevo Mayor Mustafa Softić complained to the German military command on 23 November 1943:

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It is 23 November and nothing has been distributed. It was the same last month. 50kg of potatoes were approved but only 6kg arrived. Not to speak of meat, fats, shoes, clothes or fuel. 1kg of flour is 200 kunas and 1kg of lard is 2,400 kunas. The Town Supply Office is a mockery of its name, not to speak of myself. Ration cards were issued for food, flour, lard, oil and shoes and these goods are wholly absent. The entire city receives annually 3,000 notes of assignment for shoes and 11kg of corn.<sup>140</sup>

In the period March–December 1944 the price of milk rose by 360 per cent, corn flour by 400 per cent and lard and butter by 420 per cent.<sup>141</sup> In such conditions of virtual starvation, the provision of money and food by the NOP to the families of its supporters can only have accelerated the spread of resistance to the regime.

The Sarajevo population suffered furthermore from war-related epidemics, in particular typhoid and typhus, which struck the city in the winters of 1942–43 and 1944–45. By the autumn of 1944 the city's school system had largely stopped functioning and coal shortages and power cuts were causing the closure of other institutions.<sup>142</sup> Finally, Sarajevo—bombed by the Germans in 1941—was in the last year of the war repeatedly bombed by Allied aircraft. On 29 November 1943 105 Sarajevo civilians were killed by an Allied air strike; on 8 September 1944, Allied bombs struck a refugee camp at Alipašin Most, killing about 300 civilians; on 7 November 1944, Allied bombing claimed another 173 Sarajevo lives.<sup>143</sup> These air strikes were in part the work of the Partisans, who regularly provided the Western Allies with detailed information on German military positions in Sarajevo and, as they prepared their final offensive to liberate Sarajevo, repeatedly requested Allied intervention against enemy forces in the city.<sup>144</sup> As the war neared its end Sarajevo's social and economic infrastructure increasingly approached total collapse.

The Sarajevo NOP network took a long time to recover following the series of mass arrests between November 1942 and April 1943. Džemal Bijedić, Secretary of the (virtually non-existent) Local Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo, was forced to flee the city following the April arrests. His successor, Esad Čengić, lost contact with the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Fifth Enemy Offensive. It was not until September 1943, with the arrival of Vladimir Perić-Valter, that contact between the Local Committee and the Provincial Committee was restored. The period represented a lull in active resistance, punctuated only by the successful actions by activists at Rajlovac airport on the northern outskirts of the city. In the summer of 1943 two Home Guard bombers laden with military equipment defected with their entire crews from Rajlovac to the Partisans. Soon afterwards the Rajlovac command was persuaded by one of its pilots, an NOP agent, to disperse its aeroplanes outside the hangars to reduce the chance of their collective destruction in an Allied air strike. They were thus vulnerable to an attack by the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Brigade on Rajlovac airport on the night of 10–11 August 1943. On this occasion thirty-four Home Guard aeroplanes were destroyed.<sup>145</sup> This Partisan attack succeeded because the responsible officer, Colonel Rogulj, failed to take any precautionary measures against it, despite knowing the attack would take place. At this time, the UNS reported that 'half the officers and NCOs at Rajlovac' were 'everything but not soldiers, and it seems that they are systematically sabotaging everything'.<sup>146</sup>

Sarajevo proper nevertheless remained quiet during the summer and autumn of 1943. Around the time of Italy's capitulation in September Tito considered

capturing the city, but nothing came of this.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile Čengić worked to piece together a new Communist organisation from the twenty or so KPJ members and sympathisers left in Sarajevo and to restore links with the NOP sympathisers present in most important factories and institutions in the city. In this period Home Guard sympathisers of the NOP were present in the City Command, Rajlovac airport, 3<sup>rd</sup> Military District, Anti-Aircraft Defence, Vehicle Command Centre, military hospital and military bakery. These supplied military information to the Communists.<sup>148</sup> Meanwhile the considerable efforts of the Chetniks to establish an organisation in Sarajevo ended in failure.<sup>149</sup> Čengić's efforts ended with his arrest on 19 September, together with about sixty more NOP activists. This, however, proved to be a relatively minor setback in light of the continuing military and political decay of the NDH and the worsening living conditions of the mass of Sarajevo's citizens. In such circumstances new recruits to the NOP were ever more plentiful.

The capitulation of Italy and the concomitant expansion of the NOP also had an impact on Sarajevo. The Sarajevo citizenry's receptiveness to the NOP was catalysed by Allied military successes, the recognition bestowed on the Partisans by the British and fear of the Chetniks. Perić-Valter reported to the Central Committee in November 1943 that he was enjoying fruitful contact with members of the former HSS and JMO in Sarajevo, who were well disposed towards the local Communists and provided them with important assistance. The entry into the Partisans of large numbers of Croats from Croatia and of Croat notables from other parts of Bosnia was dampening the Sarajevo Croat citizenry's support for the NDH; even some of the Catholic clergy were beginning to support the Partisans, Perić-Valter claimed.<sup>150</sup>

A further bonus for the NOP, illustrating the Ustasha's failure to construct a genuinely ethnically homogeneous and totalitarian state, was the continued presence of large numbers of ethnic Serbs in sensitive positions in the NDH military apparatus in Sarajevo. As late as the autumn of 1943 the Home Guard Military-Technical Institute continued to employ many Serbs who enjoyed close links with Serbs living in Partisan areas, supplying them with identity cards and military information.<sup>151</sup> Work battalions in Sarajevo in early 1944 comprised ethnic Serb soldiers with Serb officers, constituting an organised force ready at any time to rise against the hated regime.<sup>152</sup> The recruitment of Serbs into the NDH armed forces did not reconcile them to the Ustasha order, but it did provide an additional security threat to the ramshackle puppet state.

In September 1944 several prominent Muslim societies—El-Hidaje, Merhamet, Hurijet, Đerzelez and Bratstvo—issued a joint resolution, distributed as a leaflet to the Sarajevo public, calling for:

all citizens of the capital city of Bosnia-Herzegovina to organise themselves, for the purposes of self-defence and self-protection, on a broad and non-confessional basis, in which a neighbour of one religion will defend where needed members of the second and third communities, thus in joint collaboration preventing all unnecessary losses.<sup>153</sup>

This appears to have been a reaction to the increasingly dangerous situation facing the population of Sarajevo: the crumbling of the NDH, the rise of the Partisans, and Chetnik advances in East Bosnia.

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The liberation of Belgrade brought the prospect of Sarajevo's liberation nearer. The Partisan poet Skender Kulenović expressed the Bosnian Partisan patriotic love for Sarajevo in an article published in *Oslobođenje* in November: 'For us, Sarajevo is no longer only the largest town of a semi-colony in yesterday's state; it shines in our consciousness as the white capital of the free people's federated Bosnia-Hercegovina. And that it will, in the days and weeks soon to come, indeed be.' Kulenović predicted that the liberation of the Bosnian capital would bring about:

a new Sarajevo; a cradle of brotherhood between our peoples; the centre of political unity of all democratic and patriotic forces. In this way, tomorrow, in the full bloom of the renewal and the building of the homeland, from Sarajevo will flow, in all the veins of state and political life, the blood of a general national rebirth, reaching to the most remote of our villages.

He concluded:

That which has in the course of these three years been revealed as the best in our people—its armed right hand; the Serb, Muslim and Croat fighters of our army—will embrace each other, thus, at the end of their heroic journey, in the heart of Bosnia-Hercegovina, at the turning point of their history. At this great moment, we shall all feel in full measures that neither the blood that we have shed, nor the suffering that we have endured, has been too dear. That joyous, great embrace of our fighters on the streets of Sarajevo will be at once the joyous embrace of all the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina. But it will be, too, the symbol of our tomorrow. Under this sign, we shall continue to build it. Under this sign we shall, whenever is necessary, defend it with the same determination with which we created it.<sup>154</sup>

The triumphant culmination of Sarajevo resistance activities would occur under the leadership of Perić-Valter (subsequently immortalised in the 1972 Yugoslav film classic *Valter defends Sarajevo*, starring Velimir 'Bata' Živojinović, the Yugoslav John Wayne). A Communist specialist in underground organisation who had previously been active in Tuzla, Perić-Valter was transferred to Sarajevo in September 1943 via the NOP network in the Home Guards. On 9 September Perić-Valter was driven by motorcycle from Tuzla to the town of Gračanica by Ahmed Hasić, a Home Guard sub-lieutenant. Gračanica was at that time held by Domdo forces under the command of Sejdo Đulić, an NOP supporter. Perić-Valter and Hasić spent the night at the home of Hasić's cousin, and the following day they discussed resistance activities with Đulić and other NOP agents. Hasić then drove Perić-Valter to the Home Guard-held town of Doboj, where he put him up in the flat of Reuf Đonlagić, Commander of the Local Home Guard Command; there they once again discussed resistance activities with local NOP activists. Shortly before midnight on 10 September Perić-Valter donned the uniform of a Home Guard sub-lieutenant, received identity papers from Đonlagić and was escorted by NOP agents to the railway station where he and Hasić seated themselves in a compartment reserved for Home Guard officers. The train took them to Sarajevo.<sup>155</sup>

At the end of October or the start of November Perić-Valter established a 'Local Commission of the KPJ for Sarajevo' tasked with restoring the movement, which eventually grew into a new Local Committee. Thanks to its patient efforts, a new KPJ organisation existed by the time of the final Partisan assault in April

1945 with over fifty members and candidates and much larger numbers in its youth wing (SKOJ) and front organisations (the Antifascist Front of Women and the United League of Antifascist Youth of Yugoslavia). The web of NOP cells and sympathisers was reestablished, covering the Central Railway Workshop and fire-room; the railway stations and Central Railway Administration; the Military Technical Institute; the Electricity Works; the post office, forestry and financial administrations of the city; the directorate of the mines; the Župan administration and police; the Office of Colonisation; and many courts, banks, schools, student homes, theatres, radio stations, factories, print shops, breweries, shops, businesses and hospitals. The NOP had cells in the town wards of Vratnik, Kovači, Bašćaršija, Centar, Bjelave, Koševo, Gorica, Hrid, Bistrik, Skenderija, Kovačići, Novo Sarajevo and others and in the suburbs of Ilidža, Vogošća, Trebević and others. The total number of people in Sarajevo working for the NOP during the last year of the war totalled about 4,000, while the Sarajevo Communists counted on 1,500 actual underground Partisans ready to fight in conjunction with a Partisan attack from without.<sup>156</sup> Around mid 1944 the Sarajevo Communists established an underground NOO for the town, with the prominent non-Communist Muslim politician Zaim Šarac as President and Perić-Valter as Secretary. Subsidiary NOOs were established in this period in the Sarajevo wards and suburbs.

Citizens of Sarajevo contributed money, food, clothes and other goods to the NOP—so-called ‘people’s aid’—which was then sent to the Partisans or distributed to refugees or families with members in prison or with the Partisans. According to one NOP activist, one of the greatest source of such aid was the Islamic charity ‘Merhamet’, in which a large proportion of Sarajevo’s citizens worked; it provided money, clothes, shoes, sheets, quilts, cushions, blankets, flour, salt, sugar, potatoes, dried plums, crockery and other goods.<sup>157</sup> This organisation was legal in the eyes of the NDH; its care of Muslim refugees was supported by both the Ustashes and the Partisans.

The most important strands of the NOP web were those in the NDH armed forces. These reached into the city police, Anti-Aircraft Defence, Vehicle Command Centre, 3<sup>rd</sup> Military District Command, Rajlovac airport, 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorised Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Complex, City Command, garrison prison, military hospital, military bakery and Home Guard courts. With such a wide web of activists, the Sarajevo Communists could monitor military movements in and through Sarajevo, intercept the telegrams and telephone calls of leading NDH functionaries and gather military information. By the start of 1944 NOP influence over the Sarajevo Anti-Aircraft Defence was so strong that the Sarajevo Local Committee was counting on its direct support in the event of a Partisan attack on the city.<sup>158</sup> In May 1944 Perić-Valter reported to the Central Committee: ‘The Home Guard is almost completely demoralised and, apart from a small number of officers—Ustashes—will not fight against us. On the other hand, it is possible that even whole units will join our army on the eve of its attack on Sarajevo.’<sup>159</sup>

In this period the NOP was acquiring weapons and munitions for the Partisans from the Military Technical Institute, the Motorised Battalion and the Artillery Complex and Home Guard warehouses and armoured trains. Home Guard sympathisers provided the NOP with classified military information on the composi-

tion, position and movements of German and NDH forces. Second Lieutenant Mustafa Šaćiragić, for example, would lead a patrol with packets of weapons and munitions to an agreed spot where they would be left for the NOP to collect. Sympathetic Home Guards were also involved in training underground Partisans in Sarajevo in the use of the weapons supplied.<sup>160</sup> Numerous Home Guard soldiers, officers and airmen defected to the Partisans in this period. And during the last months of Ustasha rule, Partisans dressed as Home Guards were sent by the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps into the city to collect military information.<sup>161</sup>

Rajlovac airport was a particular hotbed of resistance activity. The airport's Information Service—responsible for air traffic, communications, intelligence and weather reports—was from the early months of the NDH's existence in the hands of individuals hostile to the Ustasha regime who, once they had come together and linked themselves to the Sarajevo NOP, put the Service to work for the latter. The section of the Service responsible for intelligence was transferred in the autumn of 1941 to the Sarajevo ward of Kovačići, where it was named the 'Intelligence Centre'. Its director Ivan Marović, a Croat air force officer who had served in the Yugoslav Army and been conscripted into the Home Guards, used his office's radio station to communicate with and provide information to Tito's Supreme Staff. When Perić-Valter arrived in Sarajevo the radio station became his link with the Supreme Staff.<sup>162</sup>

Marović's colleague Marijan Dugandžić, another Croat former officer of the Yugoslav army conscripted into the Home Guard, was director of communications at the Information Service and likewise worked for the NOP. From the autumn of 1943 Dugandžić began to employ the NDH air force's radio station at Rajlovac to transmit military information to Tito's Supreme Staff. He claims to have suggested the idea to Perić-Valter on the following grounds:

Such an illegal radio link from an enemy centre such as Rajlovac airport, in the immediate vicinity of Home Guard and German units, can ease our work, for it would occur to nobody to look for an illegal radio station in an NDH air force base. That would seem impossible and unimaginable. Such temerity on our part can, to a certain extent, guarantee our success. To whom would it occur to look for an illegal radio-station in such an airport, still more that that radio station is the same one that works for the Home Guard air force grid, that it is actually one of the main radio stations of the NDH and at the same time maintains a radio-link with the Supreme Staff of the NOP?<sup>163</sup>

The radio station, which was relocated in early 1944 to the Kovačići site, sent military information directly to Tito's Supreme Staff until the eve of the final battle for Sarajevo. The site of the Information Service was also used during this entire period by the Germans for their information-gathering activities, so that both occupiers and resistance were employing the same premises for the same activities. The NOP agents were never uncovered, though they lived until the final days under great nervous tension and several times had to be ordered by Perić-Valter not to abandon their activities and flee to the Partisans.<sup>164</sup>

Home Guards played a crucial role in the transfer of NOP activists, weapons, medical supplies and other goods out of Sarajevo to Partisan territory. In the NOP cell in the Home Guard 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorised Battalion there were several Home Guard drivers, including the chauffeurs of top Home Guard commanders. These drivers

would regularly transport NOP activists from Sarajevo to Partisan territory and occasionally back again. Since they drove military vehicles, they could do so without interference from the police or the army. They transported individual activists or small groups in cars and motorcycles and larger groups in lorries and ambulances. In mid 1944, according to one of the activists in the Battalion, a Home Guard lorry transported a group of thirty activists to the city outskirts.<sup>165</sup> On another occasion, Sarajevo delegates to a Partisan youth congress held in Jajce were selected from activists from the 9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Complex. Leaving Sarajevo dressed in their Home Guard uniforms, they were able to reach Ilijaš, on the city outskirts, unmolested by the police. They then journeyed along the bank of the River Bosna until they were met by a Partisan escort, which transported them to Partisan territory. Once among the Partisans, the youth delegates removed their Home Guard emblems and replaced them with red stars. They remained in their Home Guard uniforms, however, all the way to Jajce.<sup>166</sup> Back at Rajlovac in September 1944, a group of officers, NCOs and airmen of the NDH air force defected to the Partisans with a large quantity of weapons.<sup>167</sup>

By the second half of 1944 the liberation of Sarajevo began to be anticipated and the Local Committee started to make the appropriate preparations. The Local Committee drew up a 'Plan of Defence for the City' and formed a staff to carry it out, named the 'Command for the Defence of the City'. The Plan involved preparations to prevent the enemy from destroying the economic and civilian infrastructure during its withdrawal; and providing support for Partisan units, both during military operations and in terms of providing shelter for troops and wounded. 'Shock groups' of armed activists were formed, numbering approximately 1,500 troops armed and equipped from Home Guard sources; the arms were frequently seized from their warehouses by activists dressed as Home Guards and then distributed to the appropriate places, ready for action. The task of these shock groups would be to strike the enemy from behind while the Partisans advanced on the city, while carrying out the actions envisioned by the Plan. Efforts were taken to instil greater discipline into the underground NOP generally. Ever greater surveillance was made of enemy troops, positions, armaments and defences. The Local Committee gradually established a sophisticated military system, involving—in addition to the Command for the Defence of the City—a 'Military Committee' for work within Home Guard units and a branch of the Department for the Protection of the People for intelligence gathering.<sup>168</sup>

The final, terrible episode of Ustasha rule in Sarajevo began in mid February 1945, when Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, the supreme commander of the Ustasha concentration camp system, arrived with his entourage in the city. During March Luburić staged a series of show trials of suspected NOP supporters. Throughout the month, dozens of citizens were tried and publicly executed or sent to Jasenovac to meet their doom. Many of the first to be executed were Muslims from Mostar, upon whom Luburić apparently wreaked vengeance for Mostar's ready surrender to the Partisans. On or around 21 March the seventeen-year-old SKOJ activist Halid Nazečić attempted to assassinate Luburić but was betrayed by his accomplice, another SKOJ activist and member of the Ustasha Youth organisation whom he had mistakenly trusted.<sup>169</sup> The NOP in Sarajevo overlapped with the resistance organised by the Young Muslims, representing the radical right among



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the Muslim population, and one participant in the plot to assassinate Luburić, Irfan Sijerčić, has suggested that the would-be assassin Nazečić was actually a Young Muslim sympathiser and that his betrayal was engineered by the Communists to avoid such a prestigious success on the part of their right-wing rivals.<sup>170</sup>

Be that as it may, the failed assassination attempt catalysed the Ustasha reign of terror. This culminated on the night of 27–28 March, when the Ustashes publicly hanged fifty-five people from the trees and lamp-posts at Marindvor near the centre of Sarajevo, where their corpses were left to dangle. People attempting to reach the bodies of relatives or friends were fired upon by the Ustashes. The torture and killings continued until the eve of the Partisan entry into the city, claiming a total of 323 lives in Sarajevo alone and several hundred more who were deported to Jasenovac and massacred *en route*. The victims included Muslims, Croats, Serbs and Jews; men and women; old and young.<sup>171</sup> Sijerčić claims that the victims included Young Muslim sympathisers deliberately betrayed by Communists to the Ustashes in order to eliminate a dangerous rival for the support of the Muslim population of Sarajevo.<sup>172</sup> On 4 April, before the Ustashes' formal announcement to their forces of their withdrawal from Sarajevo, Luburić and his entourage fled the city.

### *The liberation of Sarajevo*

The liberation of Serbia enabled the Partisans to shift from guerrilla to conventional warfare. On New Year's Day 1945 the Supreme Staff reorganised its forces in the liberated territories—facing the Germans in northern Yugoslavia—into the '1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies'. In the south was the 8<sup>th</sup> (Dalmatian) Corps, renamed on 1 March the '4<sup>th</sup> Army'. In the centre there remained the Sarajevo Group of corps and behind enemy lines the People's Liberation Armies of Croatia and Slovenia, still autonomous under their own staffs. Despite the Partisan activity, the Wehrmacht's Army Group E had successfully withdrawn most of its troops from Greece and Albania through eastern and central Yugoslavia and across the River Sava, but remained in possession of Sarajevo. After taking Mostar on 14 February, the Partisans within three weeks liberated most of the rest of eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, including the towns of Višegrad, Zvornik, Han Pijesak, Vlasenica, Srebrenica, Bratunac, Goražde, Rogatica, Jablanica, Ostrožac and Konjic. This put them within reach of Sarajevo, now surrounded on three sides by Partisan forces. To the north-east of the city in the Romanija-Zvijezda region was the 3<sup>rd</sup> (East Bosnian) Corps; to the west in Central Bosnia was the 5<sup>th</sup> (West Bosnian) Corps based in newly liberated Travnik; and in and around the mountains of Bjelašnica, Treskavica and Jahorina to the south was the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Montenegrin-Herzegovinian) Corps. These three corps consisted altogether of seven divisions and twenty-eight brigades. Defending Sarajevo, the Bosna River valley and the area to the north was the German 21<sup>st</sup> Mountain Corps comprising two divisions, three brigades, five regiments and several smaller units. In addition, there were three mixed Ustasha-Home Guard divisions in and around Sarajevo. These forces were then reinforced by the 7<sup>th</sup> SS Prinz Eugen Division, sent from Slavonia to defend Sarajevo.

The Sarajevo Local Committee had by March 1945 obtained from an agent in the Wehrmacht the complete plan of the internal and external military defences

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of Sarajevo, including the locations and constructions of bunkers and the equipment and armaments of the defenders. This was taken from the Wehrmacht Command for Sarajevo itself. The plan was then sent by courier to the Partisans of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps who were preparing to liberate the city. To this was added numerous additional information and photographs collected by agents among the Home Guards.<sup>173</sup> On the basis of this information, highly detailed attack plans were drawn up at the staffs of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps and 10<sup>th</sup> Division. In the words of a Partisan intelligence officer:

Every bunker, fortification, trench, artillery position, minefield and wire obstruction was sketched with textual information on the numerical strength of the garrison, its armaments and attitude toward the NOP and with symbols of the armaments that would be needed to destroy the fortification, trench or bunker. Besides data on the anti-aircraft units and their locations, we received data on units at Pašino brdo, Grdonj, Zabrdje, Hum, Lemezovo brdo, Stup, Mojnilo, Lukavica, Vraca, Zlatište, Kobilja glava, Trebević, etc. For every officer and NCO of these units, data were provided on their attitudes toward the NOP, as well as the morale and political attitude of the units as a whole.<sup>174</sup>

Meanwhile, following the Germans' discovery that the plan had been stolen, twenty-five German officers and soldiers and 150 NDH troops were arrested; the German chief of staff in Sarajevo was compelled to commit suicide.<sup>175</sup>

The Supreme Staff on 1 March renamed itself the 'General Staff of the Yugoslav Army', and on the same day began preparations for the offensive to liberate Sarajevo. The Partisans liberated Goražde on 5 March and Rogatica on 7 March. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps was ordered to move into Romanija; advancing with difficulty in the face of German resistance, its forces liberated Sokolac on 14–15 March. On 15–16 March, a 140-strong Home Guard company guarding Mt Trebević, overlooking Sarajevo, went over to the NOP and joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Shock Division.<sup>176</sup> On 17 March the General Staff ordered the unification of the commands of the three corps around Sarajevo. They were merged into an Operational Staff of the Sarajevo Group of Corps under Radovan Vukanović as commander, Slavko Rodić as deputy commander and Drago Đukanović as chief of staff. The Operational Staff thus commanded a unified force of about 50,000 Partisans supported by the underground organisation in and around Sarajevo, against about 38,000 enemy soldiers. The Partisans took Trnovo, to the south of Sarajevo, on 23 March.

The Germans defending Sarajevo were mostly troops of the 21<sup>st</sup> Mountain Corps. They included the 181<sup>st</sup> Infantry, 369<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> SS Divisions and a number of smaller units—including some Ustasha, Home Guard and Chetnik units—under the overall command of General Katner. The German 34<sup>th</sup> Corps to the north of the city staged on 19–23 March a counter-offensive to keep the German escape route clear, driving the Partisan 2<sup>nd</sup> Army back from the Trebava-Posavina region and reoccupying several towns in the area. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was consequently unable to participate further in the Sarajevo operation. On 20 March Hitler approved the German withdrawal from Sarajevo; the Germans were therefore to pull out of the city under fire from the Partisans. On the night of 29–30 March, the forces of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps forced the River Bosna at Kakanj, hindering the German withdrawal. By 31 March the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps had crossed the river and was advancing against the Germans to the north of the capital. Driving back the 7<sup>th</sup>

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SS Division, it took Vareš on 3 April. Meanwhile the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps advanced through Romanija against the 7<sup>th</sup> SS Division from the other side. The blows inflicted on the 7<sup>th</sup> SS Division deprived the German 21<sup>st</sup> Corps in the city of its reserve. Meanwhile the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps advanced through the mountains in the south, briefly taking the summit of Mt Trebević overlooking Sarajevo on 3 April before being thrown back again by the Ustashas. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Shock Division liberated the town of Olovo, to the north of Sarajevo, on 3 April.

Meanwhile in the city the KPJ Local Committee for Sarajevo on 3 April ordered its shock groups to begin action. Dressed in NDH uniforms, they were to patrol the city both day and night to monitor the movements of enemy troops; to be ready to protect the civilian infrastructure from destruction by the latter; and to be prepared to assist the soldiers of the Yugoslav Army as they entered the city.<sup>177</sup> On the night of 4–5 April, NOP agents in the Home Guards arranged the removal from position of all anti-aircraft batteries in the city, which were withdrawn to the suburb of Stup. The following day the commander and the Ustasha sympathisers among this group of Home Guards were disarmed, while about 1,000 of these Home Guard were recruited into the Partisans. Other sections of the Home Guards, by agreement with the NOP, likewise ceased their resistance.<sup>178</sup> Also on the night of 4–5 April, the Ustashas collected the remaining 460 political prisoners in Sarajevo and transported them to Jasenovac, where they were immediately killed. Nevertheless, at twelve noon on 5 April the shock groups of the Sarajevo NOP seized control of Bistrik, in the heart of Sarajevo.

The final assault on the city began on 5 April. The forces of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, having advanced with difficulty through Romanija, approached the city from the east. The 38<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division, comprising the 17<sup>th</sup> Majevisa, 18<sup>th</sup> Croat and 21<sup>st</sup> Tuzla Brigades, was to enter the city from the north-east, via Sedrenik and Bjelave to Centar. The 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division, comprising the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim, 19<sup>th</sup> Birač and 20<sup>th</sup> Romanija Brigades, was to enter from the east through Vasin Han and Vratnik to Bašćarsija. This was the most multinational Bosnian Partisan division, including as it did not only a large number of Muslims and Croats, but also about 600 Kosovo Albanians.<sup>179</sup> The forces of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, fighting for control of Trebević and Pale, were to advance from the south. The 37<sup>th</sup> Sanjak Division was to cross Trebević into Bistrik and advance to Skenderija, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Montenegrin Division was to liberate the area of the town from Skenderija to Ilidža and the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division was to block the enemy's escape route to the north-east. Finally, the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps was to advance into Sarajevo from Zvijska to the north of the city, via Slatina and Koševo to Marindvor, though in the event its forces—the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Divisions—were delayed or diverted, and so did not participate in the fighting in the city itself. This meant that the entire attack was to be spearheaded by the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade was the first to enter the city, perhaps in order to reassure the Muslim population. On 5 April at about 4pm the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade, approaching the city gate at Vratnik, met activists of the underground NOP. The latter provided the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade with information about German troop positions and told it of a 400-strong Home Guard garrison's readiness to surrender. The underground activists then guided the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade into the city.<sup>180</sup> Meanwhile other NOP activists and sympathetic members of the

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Muslim militia threw the German troops back from the old city walls. Members of the underground shock groups attacked and killed the German soldiers defending Vratnik; the Home Guard garrison indeed surrendered without a struggle; and the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade entered the city bloodlessly through the Vratnik gatehouse at about 5:30pm. The Partisans were greeted by cheering local people bearing gifts for the liberators. There, too, they met Perić-Valter and his escort, who coordinated further action with them. While Miloš Zekić, Commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> East Bosnian Division, gave an improvised speech, the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade advanced towards the heart of the Sarajevo old town at Baščaršija. At 6pm, troops of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade fought their first engagement with German troops in the city, at the City Hall. NOP activists seized the electricity works, the railway station, the viaduct and the headquarters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Military Region, to protect them from any attempt by the retreating enemy to blow them up. As the Partisan veterans and historians of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade, Ahmet Đonlagić and Čamil Kazazović write: 'The Staff of the Brigade concluded that the electricity works was functioning and was in our hands by the fact that the streets and the greater part of the town were illuminated.'<sup>181</sup> As the Germans retreated westward, Partisans of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade raised the red flag above the City Hall.

All that day and night the Partisan 27<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Divisions battled the retreating Germans through the city from the City Hall to Marindvor, fighting engagements at the Central Post Office, the electricity works, the theatre, the tobacco factory and other places. By about 7:30pm the old town and city centre north of the Miljačka River were in Partisan hands. Meanwhile by 5pm the 37<sup>th</sup> Sanjak Division had finally liberated Pale and by 6pm the summit of Trebević, descending into the southern Sarajevo ward of Bistrik by 9pm. As the Partisans advanced on both banks of the Miljačka westward towards Marindvor, the last German troops in the city centre succeeded after heavy street-fighting in breaking out of the encirclement round about midnight, though four of their tanks were destroyed by the Partisans in the process. At 5am on 6 April the Germans abandoned their barracks and the railway station and withdrew towards Ilidža and beyond as the 5<sup>th</sup> Montenegrin Brigade entered the city from the south through Vraca. In the west, the 7<sup>th</sup> Montenegrin Youth Brigade liberated Ilidža and the source of the River Bosna. By 8am the city was liberated.

German efforts to destroy Sarajevo's utilities prior to their withdrawal were thwarted by the activities of the Sarajevo NOP, as were the efforts of the Ustashes to take away with them a number of valuable artefacts and documents from the National Museum.<sup>182</sup> The Germans and Ustashes nevertheless succeeded in destroying several utilities, including the arsenal at Hum in the centre of the city. Perić-Valter strove to preserve as many of Sarajevo's utilities as possible and met the Staff of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division to obtain troops with which to protect them. After ensuring that the electricity works and the Central Post Office had not been destroyed Perić-Valter called the fire brigade to put out a fire at the tobacco factory. It was at the tobacco factory that Perić-Valter with a group of his fighters came under enemy fire on the night of 5–6 April. Ironically, this mastermind of underground activity wrongly believed he was being fired upon accidentally by his own side. He called upon the 'Partisans' to hold their fire, which the latter thereupon intensified. Perić-Valter was struck by a mortar shell and killed

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instantly.<sup>183</sup> He therefore did not live to see how by the morning of 6 April, on the fourth anniversary of the Axis attack on Yugoslavia, the Bosnian capital was free of enemy troops. By a strange coincidence, it was on this same date forty-seven years later that Bosnian independence was internationally recognised.

A certain bitterness was, nevertheless, felt by at least one veteran of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade at the failure of the Communists to accord due recognition to his unit's vanguard role in the operation. Ibrahim Lojić, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade, stated half a century later:

I think that 6 April was proclaimed the day of the liberation of Sarajevo because on 5 April, not a single Serbian, Serb or Montenegrin unit had entered the city, and it would have been "inappropriate" for it to have been said that it was precisely a Muslim brigade that had liberated Sarajevo, the heart of Bosnia... They waited until the mentioned Partisan units entered Sarajevo, and then formally proclaimed Sarajevo's liberation... If by chance some other Partisan brigade had done what the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade had done, I am certain that its commander and fighters would have collected the glory of immortal champions and people's heroes. This way, we were literally pushed into the background.<sup>184</sup>

While the battle was raging in the city, the Partisans of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corp proceeded to liberate the territory to the north of the capital, disarming the remnants of the Chetniks and militias they encountered on the way. At the village of Košara, the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division surprised the East Bosnian Chetnik commander Gojko Borota and killed him along with his staff. The 10<sup>th</sup> Division thereupon liberated the small towns to the north and north-west of Sarajevo: Vogošća, Ilijaš, Breza, Podlugova, Semizovac, Rajlovac, Reljevo and Visoko. At Visoko, the Germans had ruined their standing with the local population when on 29 July 1944 they disarmed the Muslim garrison of the town at the request of the Chetniks. A UNS agent reported in September: 'Because of this event, there reigns in the entire locality a great tension, and the bitterness of broad popular layers towards the Germans has assumed dimensions not seen up till now.'<sup>185</sup> Here, during the battle for Sarajevo, Home Guard forces joined the Partisans and the citizenry to defeat the Germans.<sup>186</sup> In conjunction with the actions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps in and around Sarajevo, this completed the liberation of the Sarajevo basin. The 5<sup>th</sup> Corps and the 29<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Division in the next few days liberated Kiseljak, Kakanj and Busovača.

The liberation of Sarajevo was the occasion for a coordinated series of celebratory patriotic statements by regional bodies of the movement, undoubtedly framed on the basis of a single ideological model. The day following the liberation the 'people of the district of Bosanski Petrovac' sent a celebratory greeting to the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH: 'From our great demonstration, held in the ruined town of Bosanski Petrovac, the people of this region send you heartfelt greetings on the occasion of the liberation of the capital of our immediate homeland *Bosnia-Hercegovina*.' The greeting ended with the slogans: '*Long live our first people's democratic Bosnian-Hercegovinian parliament! Long live free Sarajevo! Death to fascism—freedom to the people!*' (Emphasis in original).<sup>187</sup> A similar greeting was sent from 'the people of the district of Drvar':

Sarajevo will no longer be the cause of trouble among the peoples, but a tower of light that will illuminate the road to the final victory over all our national enemies, and be a source of

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the idea of kinship and brotherhood of our people and our generation. Long live the unity of the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina! Long live Democratic Federative Yugoslavia!<sup>188</sup>

And from the 'people of the Grahovo district': 'To you, as the supreme representative of the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina, we send our greetings, enraptured and overjoyed, on the occasion of the liberation of Sarajevo, the capital of our new immediate homeland, federated Bosnia-Hercegovina!'<sup>189</sup>

The liberation of Sarajevo was the occasion for patriotic exultation on the part of the Bosnian Partisan press. On 9 April *Oslobođenje* reported:

The moment we have been waiting for has arrived! On our proud Bosnia and Hercegovina the full light of freedom has shone. Broken are the heaviest chains that have shackled the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina in their struggle for freedom. Destroyed is the biggest nest of the Kraut serpents and their Ustasha-Chetnik brood... Sarajevo, the heart of Bosnia-Hercegovina, today again is free!<sup>190</sup>

The Partisans staged a massive rally in Sarajevo two days after their victory. *Oslobođenje* reported that '50,000 citizens of the free city of Sarajevo' gathered to hear celebratory speeches; one of these, given by Nedo Zec on behalf of the Serbs of Sarajevo, stated that 'our beautiful Sarajevo has become the centre of free, democratic and federated Bosnia-Hercegovina'.<sup>191</sup> *Front Slobode* reported on 15 April: 'The love of the fighters and leaders toward Sarajevo has been enormous. In this regard, there has been no difference between Bosnians, Serbians and Albanians. Everywhere there reverberated songs in our and in the Albanian language, songs which sung of Tito and the struggle.' Furthermore:

In this way Sarajevo, the capital city of federated Bosnia-Hercegovina, after 4 years of darkness and slavery, is liberated. The liberation of Sarajevo is so much more significant because it fell on 6 April, on the day when, in 1941, Yugoslavia was attacked by raging German and Italian fascism. In the heart of every citizen of Sarajevo, 6 April 1945 will remain as the most beautiful and brightest day in their life.<sup>192</sup>

A considerable section of the Sarajevo population joined the Partisans following the liberation. According to one source, over 9,000 young men and women joined the Yugoslav Army on the day following liberation and at least one in ten of these was killed in the weeks that followed.<sup>193</sup> The victory at Sarajevo involved the capture of about 10,000 Home Guards, Ustashas and NDH policemen. The several thousand Home Guard prisoners were mostly enrolled in the Yugoslav Army.<sup>194</sup> On 10 April 1945 15,000 Sarajevans came onto the streets to attend Perić-Valter's funeral.

The Partisans inherited a capital city that had been thoroughly looted and vandalised by the Nazis and Ustashas during four years of occupation, particularly in the period immediately before their withdrawal. Sarajevo's total losses in World War II, according to one study, amounted to 9,071 civilian victims of the Axis and its collaborators and 1,890 who were killed as Partisans, amounting to 10,961 or 12.9 per cent of the pre-war population of the city. This amounts to every eighth Sarajevan, a proportion higher than the Yugoslav average. In absolute terms, this is a figure equivalent to Sarajevo's losses in the war of 1992–95; relative to the size of the city's population at the time it is much higher. These figures do not include

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those killed as members of collaborationist forces or by the Communists. Of those murdered by the Axis and its collaborators, the overwhelming majority or 7,092 were Jews, while 1,427 were Serbs, 412 Muslims, 106 Croats and 34 others. Of the 1,890 slain Sarajevo Partisans, 821 were Serbs, 499 Muslims, 316 Jews, 189 Croats and 65 others. Altogether about 6,000 Sarajevans fought as Partisans prior to the city's liberation and several thousand more joined the struggle thereafter.<sup>195</sup> The Central Railway Workshop alone provided 430 fighters of the People's Liberation Army and about another 400 garrison soldiers.<sup>196</sup> Some 15,000 members of the underground Sarajevo NOP participated in the uprising of April 1945, of whom one in ten was an armed fighter.<sup>197</sup>

### *The liberation of Zenica*

The industrial town of Zenica, to the west of Sarajevo, lies at the precise centre of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was here that the Bosnian Communists had attempted to launch their first spectacular act of industrial sabotage against the NDH—unsuccessfully, thanks to the actions of an Ustasha mole in the ranks of the local Communists.<sup>198</sup> Zenica was also an area where Chetnik influence over the local Serb population was strong; the Zenica Partisan Detachment collapsed in the spring of 1942 under the influence of Chetnik agitation and propaganda and the attempt by the Staff of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps in October 1943 to reestablish it failed in the face of continuing strong Chetnik agitation among the Serb population of the region.<sup>199</sup> Nevertheless, this ethnically very heterogeneous town had always possessed a strong anti-Ustasha current among the citizenry, and following the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, leading citizens began to come over to the NOP, hampering Ustasha efforts to suppress the latter. Hinko Forstinger, the NDH's District Superintendent, assumed the role of intermediary between the regime and the resistance, through whom the latter put pressure on the former.

In Zenica in this period, the Communist Ivan Rački organised a highly successful underground resistance. In April 1944 Rački's agent at the German police headquarters in the town informed the local Communists of German plans for mass arrests, allowing them to hide their activists in time. Mate Došen, a Home Guard captain based in the town, informed Rački of all military actions planned against the Partisans in the Zenica region. Through his agents in the Zenica prison, Rački was able to reclassify political prisoners so as to lighten their prison regime. Došen was able to persuade the Germans to allow him to recruit some of these prisoners into his Home Guard unit. Safet Uzunović, who worked at the telephone exchange in Zenica, 'registered every important conversation that was of interest to the NOP in Zenica'—in the words of Ćamil Kazazović, historian of the Zenica NOP—and passed on military information gleaned from Home Guard commanders to the Partisans.<sup>200</sup>

Meanwhile German collaboration with the Chetniks weakened the Ustasha regime. On 13 April the Ustasha militia retaliated against Chetnik maltreatment of the local population by capturing and disarming a group of fifty or sixty Chetniks; the Germans immediately forced the Ustashas to release them and return their weapons. On this occasion the citizenry thoroughly approved of the Ustasha militia's action, but were disgusted by the behaviour of the Germans.<sup>201</sup> In May



1944 the UNS reported: 'In absolutely all layers of the citizenry of the town of Zenica there is great discontent with the Croatian state government, and particularly towards the German armed forces, because of the very frequent heedless destruction of the livelihood and property of the population, particularly the Muslim part.'<sup>202</sup> By this time the Germans' collaboration with the Chetniks had largely discredited them in the eyes of the townspeople.<sup>203</sup> In late May the Chetniks attacked an NDH observation post on the River Bosna near Zenica, and though they were repelled the Germans investigated the attack and refused to take any retaliatory action against the Chetniks. 'Because of this there is great bitterness toward the Chetniks and Germans, among the Croats of Zenica', the UNS reported.<sup>204</sup> At about this time, the Chetnik commander Jovo Lakić apparently announced to his forces that the border of 'Great Serbia' had been established on the River Bosna and that the NDH government had no jurisdiction on the eastern bank of the river. Zenica citizens trying to cross the river were apparently subjected to border checks by the Chetniks, all with the acquiescence of the Germans.<sup>205</sup> An Allied air strike on Zenica on 29 May created further panic among the citizenry.<sup>206</sup>

In June 1944 the Partisans built upon their political activity in the Zenica region by forming a 'Vlašić Partisan Detachment', for which they mobilised among local Croat and Muslim villages, though they had more success among the Muslims than among the Croats. By late August there were 600 soldiers in the Detachment. During September two large-scale defections from the Zenica Home Guard to the Partisans took place, involving almost an entire Home Guard battalion, as well as Došen and his men, who brought with them a large quantity of weaponry. So swollen with former Home Guards had the Vlašić Detachment become that the Staff of the 11<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division intended to convert it into a brigade in its own right, though this was overruled by the Staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, which resolved instead to use the Detachment's manpower to top up existing brigades. Nevertheless, the publication of the Supreme Staff's amnesty for collaborationist soldiers in November allowed the Detachment to replenish its ranks with former Home Guards, Chetniks and militiamen.<sup>207</sup> The UNS reported in early October 1944 that 'all Muslim men from Zenica have fled either to the Green Forces or to the Partisans, so that in the town remain only women, children and old people'. The Green Forces in this region were reported to be 'saying openly that they seek the autonomy of Bosnia-Hercegovina'.<sup>208</sup> In this period, again, the citizens were reported as being outraged when the Germans allowed Chetniks to roam the city.<sup>209</sup>

Zenica's location at the precise centre of Bosnia-Hercegovina, on the border between the east and west Bosnian *oblasts*, led in November 1944 to a peculiar misunderstanding within the Bosnian Communist organisation. The Zenica sector was at this time transferred from the jurisdiction of the Banja Luka to the Sarajevo Okrug Committee, because the former was overstretched. At this time each Okrug Committee formed a District Committee for Zenica: the Banja Luka Okrug Committee, in conjunction with the Jajce-Travnik Okrug Committee, formed a Zenica District Committee in Travnik; and the Sarajevo Okrug Committee formed a Zenica District Committee in Fojnica. Thus two parallel bodies had accidentally been set up for the same territory. The first of these had four

members and the second, three; two individuals were simultaneously selected for both bodies.<sup>210</sup>

In Zenica, by the end of 1944 the Muslim population was overwhelmingly pro-NOP, while both the Serbs and the Croats were in large part hostile to them. The Ustashes responded to NOP activity in the town with massive arrests, yet in February 1945 the Partisans were able to mobilise about 1,000 new troops, mostly Muslims. The Muslim militias in this period were going over en masse to the Partisans, though the Serbs remained largely under Chetnik influence. On 19 February the old Bosnian capital of Travnik was liberated by the Partisans for the last time. Both Partisans and Germans built up forces in Zenica during March as the final showdown over the Sarajevo region approached. On 9 April after Sarajevo had been liberated, the Partisans launched their offensive to take Zenica using the 10<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division and a 'Group of Brigades for the Zenica Sector' specially formed for the area. On the 10<sup>th</sup> a group of intelligence officers from the Partisan 5<sup>th</sup> Corps entered the town disguised as German soldiers. In conjunction with Zenica's NOP activists they arranged the protection of Zenica's industrial assets from enemy attempts at destruction; they also collected military information. Zenica was liberated on the night of 11–12 April after three days of heavy fighting.<sup>211</sup> The Ustashes carried out indiscriminate massacres of citizens during their last days in the town. It was perhaps symbolic, therefore, that as the Ustashes and Germans finally retreated from the town, the incoming Partisans found their entry bathed in light. Kazazović recounts: 'The workers in the electricity works, who had previously turned off the boilers and taken down vital parts of the installations, once again reactivated the works, and illuminated the entry of the Partisans into Zenica.'<sup>212</sup>

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## CONSTRUCTING A BOSNIAN NATION-STATE

c. JULY 1944–DECEMBER 1946

*In that epoch of Tito's there lives, grows and flowers  
 Tito's and our democratic,  
 New fatherland of the working people  
 The Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina*

Branko Čubrilović, poem at the Constituent Assembly of the  
 People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina (30 December 1946)<sup>1</sup>

The process of constructing a Bosnian state grew out of the People's Liberation Movement, but it did not end with the final liberation of the country in the spring of 1945. The Bosnian Partisans continued the process of establishing the new state through the creation of government departments, a bureaucracy and other national, regional and local institutions. This culminated in the promulgation of a constitution for the Bosnian state at the end of 1946. The new People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina was a nation-state whose legal and constitutional structure and national symbols reflected its Partisan and Communist background as well as Bosnia's pre-war heritage. Formally, it was firmly sovereign, unified and unitary. Bosnia's historic internal territorial arrangement, dating back to the Ottoman era, was restored, albeit only briefly—an implicit recognition that the 'new' Bosnia was not, in fact, entirely new, but was also a restoration of something that had existed before. But although the People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina was organised as a nation-state, it was not underpinned by any recognised 'nation', as was the case with the other five Yugoslav republics. It was, in other words, a nation-state without a nation. With no national history or symbols that were acceptable to all Bosnia's nationalities or to all Yugoslavs generally, generic Communist motifs—the red flag; factory chimneys signifying industrialisation—formed the basis for the new state's flag and coat of arms. Communism

substituted for a non-existent Bosnian nationalism; it provided the ideological glue that bound the Bosnian republic together.

The Bosnian and wider Yugoslav federal state-building processes ran parallel, each decisively influencing the other. The form of the new Yugoslav state was determined by the fact that it was a union or association of six constituent republics. Likewise, the form of these republics—and particularly Bosnia, as the Yugoslav lynchpin—was determined by their membership in the union. The unification of Bosnia with the five other Yugoslav republics on a federal basis was presented to the Bosnian Serb population as amounting to true Serb national unification, such as had not occurred in inter-war Yugoslavia. Serb national aspirations were therefore reconciled with the principle of Bosnian autonomy. Yet the constitutional resolution of the Bosnian national question enacted by the Communists was, from the start, an uneasy compromise.

### *Organising the Bosnian state*

In the weeks that followed the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH, the Presidency of that body set about building the Bosnian state at the governmental, regional and local levels. It issued directives on such matters as the care of war invalids, the collection of information about war criminals and war damage, and the establishment of a Committee of the Red Cross for Bosnia-Hercegovina. On 6 July 1944, the Presidency took major steps to organise the embryonic Bosnian government. Six governmental departments were to be established: the Departments of the National Economy, National Education, National Health and Social Security, Reconstruction, Justice and Nutrition. On 18 August two more were added: the Administrative and Financial Departments. The Department of the National Economy was organised into different divisions: Agriculture and Animal Husbandry; Veterinary Care; Forestry and Mining; Industry and Craft; Trade and Credit; and Construction and Traffic. Within the Department of National Education, divisions were established for Elementary Education and Literacy Courses; Middle Education; National Enlightenment; and Science and Arts. When on 3 September the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH decreed the establishment of the departments, a Department of Information was added. At the same time, it ordered the establishment of sub-departmental divisions within the appropriate departments, and the establishment of departments and divisions for the NOOs at the *oblast* and lower levels.

The statehood and self-rule of the members of the Yugoslav Federation were taken seriously by the Communist leadership in this period. The NKOJ resolved on 19 August that 'financial autonomy of the federal units is one of the basic tenets of the federative organisation of Yugoslavia'. On this basis, the NKOJ laid out guidelines for the issuing of scrip by each federated unit, with the proviso that 'the coupons of one unit be legal tender only on the territory of that unit, and that the transfer and circulation of coupons of one unit on the territory of another be prevented'. National banks were to be established for each of the federated units, with control over enemy capital and banking facilities on their respective territories. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH resolved on 26 October:

## CONSTRUCTING A BOSNIAN NATION-STATE

With the federative organisation of Yugoslavia and the organisation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent federal unit, the political conditions for the development of the national economy, including cooperatives, as economic concerns have changed fundamentally for the better. The national economy, including cooperatives, will develop now with full speed; they will work for the benefit of the people, led by friends of the people, which was not the case before.

It contrasted this with the colonial exploitation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the former states of which it had been part.<sup>2</sup>

The NKOJ issued a directive on 1 September 1944 laying the basis on which the members of the Yugoslav federation were to organise their internal administrative affairs: 'The founding principle, that *every federal unit, within the framework of Federative Yugoslavia, independently constructs its state government*, applies also to the question of internal affairs' [emphasis in original]. According to this directive the fields of public order and peace, the security of citizens with regard to the state, person and property, the regulation of citizenship and residency and the establishment of the militia and other fields not specified all fell under the jurisdiction of the individual federal units.<sup>3</sup>

The state-building process was carried out also at the local and regional levels. On 19 August the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH issued a directive aimed at establishing a backbone for the state, in the form of an 'organ of internal administration' at the level of the NOOs. The duties of this organ were to include the organisation of a militia; action against criminals; the collection of information about war criminals; the safeguarding of law and order; and general matters of state administration. This directive therefore provided the state with its own instrument of repression independent of the military. At the end of August the Legislative Council of ZAVNOBiH submitted a blueprint to the Presidency, laying down a uniform system of rules for local and regional government across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the *oblast*, *okrug*, district, municipal, town and village levels. For the first time, in the larger towns and regional units, the executive and legislature were to be separated, with the establishment of the institution of the 'People's Liberation Assembly', each assembly to elect the NOOs. The directive established the number of councillors per capita and the system of their election. Village, town and municipal NOOs or assemblies were directly elected by their constituents, while the assemblies at the district, *okrug* and *oblast* levels were each formed from delegates from the assemblies of the subordinate two levels; thus, *oblast* assemblies were to be formed from delegates of the *okrug* and district assemblies; *okrug* assemblies from delegates of the district assemblies and municipal NOOs; and district assemblies from delegates of the municipal NOOs. The borders between the respective units were to be determined by ZAVNOBiH.

The Oblast People's Liberation Assemblies, as the highest organs of government beneath the country level, were to establish Departments for the Economy, National Health and Social Security, Education, Justice, Administration, Finance, Food Supply and Reconstruction, each of which was to be further divided into divisions responsible for different fields. Each Okrug and District Assembly had fewer departments, while the village and municipal NOOs were to exercise all aspects of government directly. This blueprint then became the basis on which

local and regional government in Bosnia-Herzegovina was organised.<sup>4</sup> In a slightly modified form, it was put in force by the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH on 15 November 1944.

The judicial and bureaucratic backbone of the state also began to solidify. Following extensive discussion, the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH decreed on 17 October 1944 the establishment of a country-wide system of 'People's Courts', as a formally independent judiciary separate from the NOOs. Courts were established at the municipal, district and *okrug* levels and judges were to be elected. The system was to be headed by a 'Provisional Court Council' as the highest body of appeal, which was to be established by the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH and made up mostly of professional lawyers. During October and November 1944 the Presidency discussed the organisation of a Department of Internal Affairs. This was to consist of two subordinate departments of General Administration and Public Security, and an Inspectorate. The Department of General Administration would consist of a General Division; a Legal Division; a Division of Registration for Civic Status; and a Division of Accounts. The Department of Public Security was to consist of a Division for Public Order; a Criminal Division; and a Division for Controlling the Movement of the Population and of Aliens. The Inspectorate was to be a central organ assisting the local organs of government in administering internal affairs. Parallel bodies or individuals responsible for local affairs were to be established for regional and local organs of government. The plan also established the basis for a People's Militia, linked to the NOOs.

Finally, the regime sought to inculcate its version of Bosnian patriotism in the minds of the young as a further necessary underpinning of the state. The 'Teaching Plan, Programme and Methodical Instruction for People's Elementary Schools', presented by the Department of People's Education to the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH on 20 November 1944, sought to encourage the sense among children of a Bosnian heritage. The Plan sought to teach children about their Bosnian homeland; in geography, they were to learn about 'Bosnia-Herzegovina as the children's immediate homeland. Mountains, rivers, forests and towns—in detail. The work of people in the present and the future, and economic wealth. The map of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the drawing of maps.' Yugoslavia as a whole and the other Yugoslav lands were accorded less emphasis. The purpose of this method of teaching geography was to build patriotism through personal interest: 'To become acquainted with the home and—coming from it—gradually the entire homeland, and to develop love towards it. It is worthwhile to begin first with the house and the child's life, garden, street, traffic, school, school-life, field, forest, etc.' In the realm of history, children were to learn about the 'Serb nation and the first Serbian state'; the 'Croat nation and the first Croatian state'; and about the 'Bosnian state—the link between the Serbs and the Croats. Kulin Ban. King Tvrtko.' The latter were Bosnia's two most illustrious medieval rulers. In this way, medieval independent Bosnia was deemed an important part of Bosnian children's education, although it was presented in essentially Serbo-Croat terms, effectively excluding the Muslim component.<sup>5</sup>

The Bosnian Partisan state-building process involved the mutual colonisation of the towns and countryside. Partisan soldiers, overwhelmingly from peasant backgrounds, occupied the towns, but the Communists also exported teachers,



engineers and other skilled professionals from the towns to assist in the economic and cultural rebuilding of the countryside. ZAVNOBiH brought together leading Bosnian professors to staff its Department of Education; leading artists and writers to engage in propaganda work and to staff the editorial board of *Oslobođenje*; leading doctors to staff its Department of Health; and so forth. Bosnia-Herzegovina was thus bound together and integrated as it had not previously been.

The entire process amounted to the construction of a Bosnian nation-state. The fact that the Communists did not recognise the existence of a Bosnian 'nation' did not change this; it simply required some theoretical finessing. Pucar, in a letter in February 1945 to Aleksandar Ranković, organisational secretary of the Central Committee, discussed this question as it related to the establishment of a 'Court of National Honour' for Bosnia:

We have similarly raised the question in connection with the formation of a Court of National Honour, which has been formed in Belgrade for the whole of Serbia, and which we too should have formed for Bosnia-Herzegovina, only this appears to us somewhat awkward. In Bosnia-Herzegovina there is no unified nation, as is the case in Serbia and Slovenia. With us there is a mix—Serbs, Croats and Muslims—and it is impossible to call that a nation, but we could consider forming for ourselves the same court with the same duties under the name of 'Court of People's Honour'. Under such a name, that court could try every citizen of our country, regardless of whether he is a Serb, Croat or Muslim, because after all, that is all together a single people [*narod*], not a nation [*nacija*].<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in Pucar's eyes, the Bosnians were not a nation in the ethno-national sense, but they were a 'people', or what is sometimes described as a 'political nation'. The Central Committee approved Pucar's formulation of a 'Court of People's Honour'.<sup>7</sup>

## *The territorial organisation of Bosnia-Herzegovina*

The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH established a commission on 14 November 1944 to determine the country's territorial-administrative organisation. This commission, consisting of Pašaga Mandžić, Drago Ljubibratić and Muhamed Sudžuka, reported back to the Presidency on 30 December. It announced that it had based its proposed territorial-administrative organisation on the traditional Bosnian internal borders. As Sudžuka explained: 'In drawing up its plan, the commission went with the administrative division of Bosnia-Herzegovina, i.e. with that which had existed from the times of Turkey, Austria and up to the division into Banovinas in 1929'. The plan noted that both the Yugoslav Dictatorship of King Aleksandar, established in 1929 and the Ustasha regime established in 1941 had obliterated Bosnia-Herzegovina's internal and external borders. Therefore, according to Sudžuka: 'The commission has taken the standpoint, given that it is a question of a provisional division, that it would be best for our territorial division also to accept the earlier division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into *okrugs*'. This involved six relatively equal units, centred on the cities of Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Mostar, Travnik and Bihać. Although all these units would be equal in status and powers, five of them would be entitled '*okrugs*' while the sixth, Herzegovina (Mostar), would be an '*oblast*'—'In order to give Herzegovina a particular position in the

existing administrative division [and] because of its historical particularity and its distinctive role in the People's Liberation Struggle.' Yet this unique status for Hercegovina would be purely nominal; the *oblast* of Hercegovina would have the same functions as the five Bosnian *okrugs*.

In their approach to the internal territorial organisation of their country, therefore, the Bosnian Partisans in 1944 proved to be more conservative than the French revolutionaries of 1789, who had abolished France's traditional provinces and imposed a wholly uniform administration. Indeed, in the debate that followed in the Presidency, the premise of adhering to the traditional administrative division was not challenged. Yet according to a particular status to Hercegovina did provoke disagreement from two non-Communist Presidency members: Jakov Grgurić of the HSS and the President of the Presidency, Vojislav Kecmanović of the Independent Democratic Party. Grgurić's opposition could almost be described as nationalistic in its defence of Bosnian administrative uniformity—according to the records:

He explains that Bosnia-Hercegovina is unified and that, because of that, there is no reason whatsoever to separate its individual parts to form a particular *oblast*. . . Separating Hercegovina to form a distinct *oblast* has also the unfortunate effect of thereby emphasising its separate position in relation to the rest of Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Grgurić's objection sparked a lively debate over the Hercegovinian question. Kecmanović, who supported him, argued simply that he saw 'no reason' to give Hercegovina a separate status and that as an *oblast*, Hercegovina would have the same functions as an *okrug*; 'consequently, the term "*oblast*" is hollow and without content'. Yet Communists and non-Communists alike in the Presidency challenged the reasoning of Grgurić and Kecmanović, some of them on the basis of a belief in a separate Hercegovinian regional identity. The Hercegovinian Muslim Communist Avdo Humo argued: 'Through history, a particular Hercegovinian distinctiveness has been formed.' He linked this to Hercegovina's traditional orientation towards Montenegro: 'The Hercegovinian people has been traditionally linked to Montenegro, and it would be unfortunate if Montenegro, which is not much larger than Hercegovina, be divided into several *okrugs*, while Hercegovina as a whole become one *okrug*.' Ante Babić, a Croat professor from Sarajevo, agreed:

The historical distinctiveness of Montenegro, although it is in national terms a constituent part of the Serb lands, has given rise to the need to organise Montenegro as a separate federated unit. Reasons of historical distinctiveness exist also when it is a question of Hercegovina. Already in the tenth century, Hercegovina had its own distinct history. We can freely say that, with time, a distinct mentality of the people was formed.

The Muslim professor of law Hamdija Ćemerlić took a still more autonomist position: 'I should go further, in that I should give Hercegovina, as an *oblast*, wider powers than those which the other *okrugs* would have.' Such a debate over the nature of regional identity went far beyond the parameters of the rigid official Communist ideology.

In the event, therefore, Grgurić and Kecmanović were easily outvoted by a majority in the Presidency—including all its Muslim members—in favour of a special status for Hercegovina. Thus the traditional internal territorial division of

Bosnia-Hercegovina was preserved and this indeed represented the intention of the plan's authors. When Kecmanović complained of the plan's apparent equation of the pre-war Yugoslavia with the NDH, on the grounds that the latter was a 'monstrosity, and in every respect the creation of our national enemies' while the former 'came about as a result of the struggle of the peoples', commission member Ljubibratić responded that 'that equation does not apply in general, but merely in regard to their relationship to the question of the administrative division of Bosnia-Hercegovina'. Thus, while King Aleksandar and Ante Pavelić had both obliterated the traditional internal borders of Bosnia-Hercegovina as part of their respective efforts at swallowing the country, it was the Bosnian Partisans—waging a specifically Bosnian liberation struggle—who restored these borders.<sup>8</sup>

The revised plan, modified on the basis of the discussion of 30 December and dated 6 January 1945, upheld this traditionalist position: 'In our People's Liberation Struggle, Bosnia-Hercegovina was restored, so it is necessary to restore also its territorial division, insofar as this has historical roots.' Similarly, 'Hercegovina, as [an] historical *oblast*, should retain its name and territorial unity' in order to 'satisfy the people of Hercegovina, which is devoted to its *oblast*, and it would be in accordance with the name of our federated unit'. The plan discussed but advised against the formation of two new *okrug* based on Livno and on Dobož. Some relatively limited border changes were nevertheless to take place between the *okrug*s, with certain districts transferred from one *okrug* to another on the basis of primarily economic considerations. At the next administrative level down: 'The districts have remained, for the most part, in the same form in which they were formed by the Austrian administration, in its time. This situation can be retained also today, insofar as it is not in conflict with new factors of development.' The plan consequently suggested the formation of a mere seven new districts. It was only at the level immediately below that significant numbers of new municipalities were to be formed alongside the old, to take into account current or predicted future local economic developments.<sup>9</sup> The plan therefore upheld the principle of evolutionary change rather than of a radical break with tradition. It was formally adopted by the Presidency on 7 February 1945.

The law on the internal territorial division of federated Bosnia-Hercegovina into *okrug*s, districts and areas of Local People's Councils was finally passed on 16 August 1945 and followed on 27 August by a decree on determining the territories of People's Councils and appointing the seats of Local People's Councils. The resulting administrative boundaries were, the Bosnian government claimed, drawn on the basis of extended consultations with local people, local representatives and geographers and therefore represented 'above all, the will of the people and the perspective of future development, as well as communications, economic and geographic elements'.<sup>10</sup> A seventh, Dobož *okrug*, was, after all, added to the six traditional units, formed from parts of the territories of the Banja Luka, Tuzla and Sarajevo *okrug*s; this was due to the size of the three named *okrug*s, the fact that some of their districts were too geographically distant from their existing *okrug* centres in Banja Luka and Tuzla and the fact that the town of Dobož was a major communications hub commanding the Bosna River valley.<sup>11</sup> In the words of an *Oslobođenje* article in support of the new territorial arrangement: 'The Yugoslav reaction worked for twenty years for the political and territorial dismemberment

of our people... This in particular affected Bosnia-Hercegovina, which was torn apart into four parts'—a reference to King Aleksandar's division of Bosnia between four different *banovinas*. Consequently, under the new arrangement: 'Larger *okrugi* councils have been established, whose seats, by their tradition, represent real political, cultural, economic and geographic centres.'<sup>12</sup>

Twenty-one new districts were added to the fifty-six that had existed before the war, making a new total of seventy-seven, divided into 1,245 territories of Local People's Councils; the increase in number was intended to make some of the older districts smaller, more manageable and less distant from the Local People's Councils. Seats of the district were either old administrative centres or industrial, communications or market centres. The law envisioned the abolition of the municipality as a unit of administration following the local and regional elections to be held in September; and the possibility that certain villages might wish to secede from one administrative unit and join another—even another member of the Federation.

The Bosnian leadership had less room for manoeuvre where Bosnia-Hercegovina's external borders were concerned. The Department of Internal Affairs before the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH, in discussing the borders of Bosnia-Hercegovina, stated in the first half of November 1944: 'The territory of Bosnia-Hercegovina is that with which it was incorporated into the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and which in the course of our People's Liberation Struggle has been once again established.' Nevertheless, unlike its internal borders, Bosnia-Hercegovina's external borders were to some extent at the mercy of its neighbours. Bosnia-Hercegovina's tiny strip of coastline on the Montenegrin border had, under the inter-war Yugoslav regime, been joined to the Montenegrin municipality of Herceg Novi and the Montenegrin Communists unilaterally retained the territory at the Third Session of the Montenegrin Antifascist Assembly of People's Liberation in July 1944, promising that ownership of the territory would be decided after the war on the basis of the will of the population. ZAVNOBiH's Department of Internal Affairs remarked somewhat half-heartedly on the matter in the first half of November 1944: 'It is understood that the question of the coastal municipality is of little importance, however it is resolved, even though that is the very place where Bosnia-Hercegovina touches the sea, but it is a fact, on the basis of Comrade Zeković's speech, that the question is still open'.<sup>13</sup> The question of the coastal municipality was raised again in the report of the commission for the territorial division of Bosnia-Hercegovina, which reaffirmed the Bosnian leadership's inability to resolve on a matter that affected the borders between different federal units.<sup>14</sup> Finally, if Vladimir Dedijer's account is to be believed, the Montenegrin Communist Blažo Jovanović convinced Pucar, as Secretary of the Bosnian Communist organisation, to drop Bosnia-Hercegovina's claim to the coastal municipality; in this context, Dedijer pointedly mentions that Jovanović was a 'lawyer by profession'.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Third Session of ZAVNOBiH*

As the liberation of Yugoslavia and Bosnia neared completion in the spring of 1945, it became finally possible for the new Yugoslav leadership to transform the provisional organs of government into regular ones. On the basis of the second

Tito-Šubašić Agreement, King Petar appointed a regency for Yugoslavia on 2 March 1945; the NKOJ and the Royal government simultaneously resigned three days later and a new provisional government was appointed on 7 March, with Tito as Prime Minister and Šubašić as Foreign Minister. The new government, which was heavily dominated by the Communists and their allies, formalised the federal character previously adopted by the NKOJ: each of the six members of the federation was represented by a minister, with Čolaković as Minister for Bosnia-Hercegovina. Other Bosnian representatives in the government were Todor Vujasinović as Minister for Transport, Vasa Čubrilović as Minister for Agriculture and Sulejman Filipović as Minister for Forestry. At the end of the month, as part of the Tito-Šubašić Agreement, AVNOJ was expanded to include fifty-three delegates from the pre-war Yugoslav parliament. On 5 April 1945 the Legislative Council of the Presidency of AVNOJ resolved that each member of the Yugoslav federation should shortly form its own government. These governments were to be formed by the respective Country Antifascist Councils and their presidencies.<sup>16</sup> Governments were formed consecutively in April by Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Hercegovina, followed in May by Slovenia.

The spring of 1945 witnessed several pieces of the Yugoslav federal jigsaw-puzzle being slotted into place. Following the establishment of the Communist Parties of Croatia and Slovenia in 1937 and Macedonia in March 1943, the Communist Party of Serbia was finally established in May 1945 in liberated Belgrade. The Politburo of the Central Committee of the KPJ then resolved on 16 June on the need to establish Communist Parties for Montenegro and Bosnia-Hercegovina as well, though in the event these were not established until 1948. On 29 March 1945 the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Sanjak resolved in favour of the Sanjak's partition between Serbia and Montenegro. This decision was ordered by the Presidency of AVNOJ, which thereby disregarded the wishes of the population and the Communist leadership of the Sanjak, both of which opposed partition.<sup>17</sup> The decision appears to have been motivated by the desire to appease both Serbian and Montenegrin opinion and possibly also that of the Serbian and Montenegrin Communists themselves. At its session of 7–9 April, the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Serbia confirmed the annexation of six of the Sanjak's eight districts to Serbia; the Montenegrin Antifascist Assembly of People's Liberation similarly confirmed the annexation of the remaining two districts of the Sanjak to Montenegro at its session of 15–17 April. On 19 June, the Presidency of AVNOJ appointed a commission to demarcate the border between Croatia and Vojvodina. The commission's proposal was accepted by the Politburo of the Central Committee on 26 June and then submitted in turn to the Yugoslav government and to AVNOJ; it drew the border so as to leave the town of Vukovar and the territory of Baranja in Croatia and the town of Šid in Vojvodina. The antifascist assemblies of Kosovo-Metohija and of Vojvodina voted to join Serbia on 8–10 July and 30–31 July respectively; the decisions were approved by the Third Session of AVNOJ on 7 August 1945 and by Serbia's parliament on 26 July 1946. The distribution of territory among the members of the Yugoslav federation was thereby virtually completed.

The liberation of Sarajevo, followed shortly by the complete liberation of Bosnia, enabled the Bosnian leadership to establish the organs of Bosnian statehood

in the capital and constitute them properly. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH resolved in March 1945 to hold elections for all local and regional representative bodies in April 1945, though in the event these elections were not held until August. An indication of the Bosnian state's newfound authority was made on 9 April 1945, when ZAVNOBiH's Department of Justice informed the Partisan 5<sup>th</sup> Corps that People's Courts were being formed on the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and that the Army had no right to interfere with them. This step was taken in response to an attempt by the Partisan Local Command of Kupres to overturn a decision of the District People's Court of Bugojno.<sup>18</sup> On 15 April the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH was transferred to Sarajevo from Jajce. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH resolved at its sitting of 16 April 1945 that the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH would be held on 26 April. The Third Session would have the task of establishing regular organs of government for Bosnia.

Simultaneously, the Bosnian leadership presided over the establishment of a city government for the Bosnian capital. On 19 April a City NOO was established under Husejin Brkić. On 21 April the Sarajevo NOO decreed the division of the city into nine wards: Centar, Bjelave, Kovači, Vratnik, Bistrik, Čobanija, Kovačići, Marindvor and Novo Sarajevo. In mid May, however, a new territorial division reduced the number of wards to four. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH discussed at its sitting of 19 April the proposed membership of the Sarajevo City NOO put forward for approval by the Preparatory Committee of the Sarajevo People's Liberation Front. The proposed membership was nationally balanced, with the Muslims Husejin Brkić and Ferid Čengić for President and Secretary, respectively, and a Serb and a Croat, Dušan Vasiljević and Ante Martinović, as Vice-Presidents. The Presidency suggested another Croat, Mato Šerka, in place of Martinović, but otherwise approved the list.<sup>19</sup>

The Third Session of ZAVNOBiH took place on 26–28 April 1945 in Sarajevo. Of 176 delegates, 155 apparently attended, though the exact list of members is not certain.<sup>20</sup> The opening speech was delivered by Vojislav Kecmanović as president, who paid tribute to the Partisan dead, as well as to 'a great name from these great historic days, who is among the dead. That is the name of the President of the United States, our great ally; that is the name of the famous and glorious Franklin Roosevelt.' Kecmanović was followed by Edvard Kardelj, Vice-President of the Federal Government, who paid tribute to Bosnia-Herzegovina and in particular to 'our brave and long-suffering Bosanska Krajina'. According to Kardelj:

Bosnia-Herzegovina has become the centre of our people's uprising. There, in the first place, Tito built our heroic People's Liberation Army. Representatives of all the peoples of Yugoslavia came here to determine the direction of the joint struggle for freedom. There, for this reason, all our peoples will eternally be grateful to Bosnia-Herzegovina for all that she gave for our common purpose.<sup>21</sup>

The third speaker was Siniša Stanković, President of the People's Assembly of Serbia, who stressed the unity of Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia. As if to provide the other half of the equation, the fourth speaker was Murat-efendi Šećeragić, a Muslim representing the Sanjak, which had recently been partitioned between Montenegro and Serbia, with the larger part going to the latter. Šećeragić pointed out that the Sanjak was now 'a constituent part of federated Serbia', but claimed that

'in the Sanjak, between the Muslim and Orthodox brothers, reign perfect love, harmony, common work', and expressed the hope that the same could be achieved in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In expressing his gratitude to the guest speakers, Kecmanović thanked Šćeragić 'for his warm words, that have in particular struck a chord here among our Muslim brothers'.<sup>22</sup> In their moment of triumph, the Bosnian Partisans had not lost sight of the precariousness of the 'brotherhood and unity' they had established, nor of the insecurity still felt among all Bosnia-Herzegovina's peoples.

Čolaković gave the first of the series of patriotic speeches that followed, remarking:

Our immediate homeland Bosnia-Herzegovina is completely liberated, thanks to the efforts of our heroic army. For four years, the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina waged a life-and-death struggle against the fascist conquerors and their Ustasha and Chetnik minions. In that struggle, they suffered enormous material losses and a lot of blood was spilt, but all that effort and all those losses were not in vain. We began with our bare hands to fight against enormous German and Italian military forces, and here we are today as victors, whose flags are not only the flags of freedom, but the flags of the brotherhood of all the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

He finished his speech with the promise: 'We shall make of our long-suffering Bosnia-Herzegovina a thriving country, in which every one of its honourable sons and daughters will be guaranteed the life of a dignified person.'

Alongside this Bosnian-patriotic rhetoric, however, Čolaković set out more hard-headed arguments in defence of the Partisan policy with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Announcing that the 'People's Liberation Movement has solved the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina', Čolaković argued that 'Bosnia-Herzegovina could not be partitioned between Croatia and Serbia, not only because Serbs and Croats are intermingled across the entire territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also because there too live Muslims, who have not yet declared themselves nationally'. Although Čolaković thereby failed to recognise the Muslims' own nationality, he nevertheless made clear that Bosnian unity was being upheld for their sake: 'They would, with justice, feel every splitting of Bosnia-Herzegovina to be an attack upon themselves; as a denial of the rights which stem from our system of democracy for all the peoples of Yugoslavia, including the Muslims.' At the same time: 'Living in equality in their immediate homeland, the Serbs and the Croats will have the broadest opportunity to link themselves in various ways with their Serb and Croat brothers in Serbia and Croatia respectively.' Consequently: 'Such a position for Bosnia-Herzegovina within Democratic Federative Yugoslavia guarantees all their peoples freedom and equality, opening for them the broadest possibilities for raising their material well-being and for cultural progress.' Bosnia-Herzegovina would no longer be an 'apple of discord between Serbs and Croats', but a 'bridge that will link equal brothers and consolidate Democratic Federative Yugoslavia'.<sup>23</sup>

Čolaković's speech was followed by speeches by Mujbeg Rustembegović, Ljubomir Peleš and Jure Begić: respectively a prominent non-Communist Muslim, Serb and Croat. They were followed by other speakers, each of whom expressed his or her own patriotism in slightly different terms, in a series of speeches that lasted for the rest of the first day and the best part of the second day



of the Third Session. In the words of Milan Guteša, a farm worker from Bosanski Petrovac: 'It has been the aspiration of centuries, the yearning of centuries, to hear the free voice of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina in our beloved city of Sarajevo. Sarajevo has never in history been as beloved as it is today. Never in its history has it been as free as it is today'.<sup>24</sup> In the words of the Communist Rato Dugonjić: 'I am exceptionally overjoyed that I can here, from this spot, greet you as a citizen of our beloved Sarajevo, long-suffering and tormented Sarajevo, which right up until a month ago watched its citizens as they hung from the chestnut trees on Marindvor, and today has experienced the fortune of having free Bosnia-Herzegovina crowned in it'.<sup>25</sup>

Several speakers raised the pan-Slavic theme, particularly in light of the 'Pact of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation' signed between Yugoslavia and the USSR on 11 April. Condemning the pre-war Yugoslav regimes for their anti-Soviet foreign policy, Čolaković promised that the new Yugoslavia would 'consolidate friendship with all freedom-loving peoples, above all with the fraternal Slavic peoples', while the USSR, for its part, would 'never forget what we have done in the common struggle against the common enemy of all Slavdom and of the whole of freedom-loving humanity. All freedom-loving peoples love our country, but none loves it as fraternally as the Russians'.<sup>26</sup> Jure Begić said of the revered deceased HSS leader Stjepan Radić that he 'never gave a single speech without honouring and exalting the great Russian nation, as the sole saviour, not only of the Slavic peoples, but of all humanity'.<sup>27</sup> According to Dimitrije Bajalica: 'Today, our units are building brotherhood on a pan-Slavic scale. Today, more than ever, the fighters of our army, with the fighters of the glorious Red Army, with the fighters from among the Poles, Czechs and Bulgarians, are forging on the battlefield the brotherhood of the Slavic peoples'.<sup>28</sup> According to Milan Guteša:

Today, when we see that five Slavic battle-flags are fluttering as they plough their way towards Berlin, towards black Berlin—that [of] the Congress of 1878; which was a conquering one; which was a partitioning one; which cut up the Slavic peoples—it will, brothers, burn. Berlin burns, and I say that there will no longer be fear for each of those who love freedom, justice and truth.<sup>29</sup>

It was left to the Serb and Croat delegates to make such speeches; the Muslims had traditionally identified themselves with the Islamic rather than the Slavic peoples.

A more sober note was nevertheless struck by Hasan Brkić and other speakers in the later part of the proceedings, who spoke of the difficulties affecting Bosnia-Herzegovina that needed still to be overcome: economic dislocation; material destruction; sickness; hunger; the loss of so many key NOP activists and fighters; widespread illiteracy; and untried war criminals. The Third Session of ZAVNO-BiH was the last all-Bosnian assembly held to mobilise support for the Partisans; it was also the first to seek to carry the mobilisation over into the field of post-war reconstruction and state-building.<sup>30</sup>

Following the speeches ZAVNOBiH passed resolutions giving the wartime, embryonic Bosnian state a more definite, permanent form. ZAVNOBiH renamed itself the 'People's Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina'; the NOOs and People's Liberation Assemblies were renamed simply 'People's Councils' and 'People's

Assemblies', dropping the now-superfluous word 'Liberation'; and the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH became the 'Presidency of the People's Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The Parliament then accepted a further forty-four members into its ranks, chosen once again to represent a broad spectrum of the Bosnian population. They included the Muslim notables Zaim Šarac and Husein (Husaga) Čišić; the Mufti Muhamed Šefket efendi Kurt; the Orthodox priests Svetozar Lazarević and Simo Begović; and the Franciscan friar Bono Ostojić. The others included academics and other middle-class professionals, and four women.<sup>31</sup> The People's Parliament then adopted a new oath of loyalty for its delegates:

I [name] swear by the honour of my people, that I shall loyally and tirelessly serve the people, that I shall carry out my duties scrupulously and with dedication, safeguarding and defending the freedom and independence, brotherhood and unity of all the peoples of Yugoslavia and all the other achievements of the People's Liberation Struggle for the happiness and progress of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the People's Parliament passed a law constituting the 'People's Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina', as the supreme executive organ of the Bosnian state. The People's Government was to be appointed by the Presidency of the People's Parliament. It was to consist of a prime minister, two deputy prime ministers and ministers of Internal Affairs, Justice, Education, Finance, Trade and Supply, Industry and Mining, Agriculture and Livestock, Forestry, People's Health, Social Politics, Construction and Local Transport. The ministers were required to swear an oath of office similar, but not identical, to the oath of members of the Parliament:

I [name] swear by the honour of my people, that I shall loyally and tirelessly serve the people, that I shall carry out my duties, according to the law, scrupulously and impartially, safeguarding and defending the achievements of the People's Liberation Struggle for the happiness and progress of Federated Bosnia-Herzegovina and Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.

The Parliament approved the Presidency's proposal of Rodoljub Čolaković to head the first government.

The first People's Government was voted into office by the People's Assembly on the following day, 28 April. Besides Čolaković, it comprised five senior Communists (Pucar as Minister without Portfolio; Ilija Došen as Minister of Internal Affairs; Hasan Brkić as Minister of Finance; Pašaga Mandžić as Minister of Trade and Supply; and Vlado Šegrt as Minister of Agriculture and Livestock) and nine non-Communists (Zaim Šarac as First Deputy Prime Minister; Jakov Grgurić as Second Deputy Prime Minister; Hamdija Čemerlić as Minister of Justice; Anto Babić as Minister of Education; Ćazim Ugljen as Minister of Industry and Mines; Ante Martinović as Minister of Forestry; Nedo Zec as Minister of Health; Cvijetin Spužević as Minister of Construction; and Novak Mastilović as Minister of Social Policy). Of course, all real power was in Communist hands; the non-Communist majority was for the sake of public and international consumption, its members chosen for their public standing, for the ethnic balance they represented and for their credibility as holders of their respective posts—thus the medical doctor Zec held the Ministry of Health, the academic Babić held the Ministry of Education,

and so on. Yet the government was not simply a front; popular support for the Partisans was sufficiently uncertain for a credible government to be needed.

The People's Assembly next recruited two new members to its Presidency, Todor Kruševac and Fazlija Alikalfić, to replace Jovo Mitrašević, who had been killed, and Brkić, who had left to join the People's Government. The Legislative Council was expanded from eight to eleven members. With these final acts, a message of greeting from Tito and a concluding speech from Kecmanović, the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH concluded. A few days later, on 2 May, the People's Government issued a declaration, pledging itself:

as the highest interest of the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, to defend and strengthen the achievements of their armed struggle; it will defend above all the equality, brotherhood and unity of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats, contributing, from its side, to the strengthening of the brotherhood of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, through whose common struggle and sacrifices was created an equal and fraternal community of peoples—Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.<sup>33</sup>

On 19 July the Bosnian parliament proclaimed 27 July, the anniversary of the Partisan liberation of Drvar in 1941, as the national holiday commemorating the start of the Partisan uprising. This took place after some discussion among delegates as to whether a date marking the start of the earlier, abortive uprising in Herzegovina in May and June should be chosen; whether the uprising in this period could be considered a general people's uprising, given its almost exclusively Serb character at this stage; and whether the uprising was more spontaneous or organised in character. The final resolution stated: '27 July is proclaimed a national holiday as the day when in 1941 in Bosnia-Herzegovina there broke out an organised people's uprising against the occupier and his minions.'<sup>34</sup>

### *Serb unity vs Bosnian sovereignty*

The establishment of a Bosnian state, involving as it did the loud affirmation of Bosnian sovereignty and stress on Bosnian patriotism, posed the problematic question of how this statehood, sovereignty and patriotism were to be reconciled with the ideal of Serb unity to which most Bosnian Serbs remained committed. There was not necessarily a contradiction between affirming Bosnian statehood and sovereignty and affirming the unity of Serbs inside and outside Bosnia, but there was a potential contradiction and it was a question that the Communists needed to address in order to reassure the Bosnian Serb population and counter Chetnik propaganda, which claimed the Communists were dividing up the Serbs. The Bosnian Serbs formed the first and the largest manpower base of the Bosnian Partisans, yet the Communists could never feel entirely certain of this base. In the spring of 1942 the Chetniks in East Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to a lesser extent in Bosanska Krajina, had subverted much of the Partisan rank and file by appealing to its Bosnian Serb members on a nationalist and sectarian basis, against the Communist policy of brotherhood and unity between Serbs, Muslims and Croats. The Communists responded by appealing to the Bosnian Serb population on the basis of a common Bosnian patriotism that embraced Serbs, Muslims and Croats alike. Although the back of the Bosnian Chetnik movement was broken by

the autumn of 1943 and reduced to a number of small, mutually isolated rebel bands by the spring of 1945, the Communists could never rest on their laurels with regard to the Bosnian Serb population. At all times the Communist regime was a multinational urban tip of an otherwise mostly rural, uneducated and largely chauvinist iceberg of the Bosnian population and the Chetnik bands remained in the hills for years after the end of the war, presenting a lingering threat. The problem of how to reconcile the Bosnian Serb population was at all times among the most pressing the KPJ faced.

The Communists were consistently ready to play upon Serb national ideology; thus, for example, the Bosnian Partisans of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division celebrated St Vitus's Day (28 June) in 1944 as a Serb national holiday and held rallies to commemorate the Battle of Kosovo of 1389, with its mythologised hero and villain, Miloš Obilić and Vuk Branković. They commemorated also Gavrilo Princip's assassination of the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand on the same date in 1914 and linked these past 'patriotic' acts with the current struggle against the occupiers and collaborators.<sup>35</sup> But while this served at the emotional level, it could not substitute for a clear position on the unity of Serbs in the different lands of Yugoslavia where they lived: Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Vojvodina, Montenegro and Macedonia—parts or all of which had traditionally been claimed by Serb nationalists, something that the Chetniks continued to do. The question became, at one level, more acute as the embryonic Bosnian nation-state took shape, for the Communists' increasingly vocal championing of Bosnian statehood and sovereignty appeared to give grist to the mill of Chetnik propaganda, which claimed that the Communists wished to dismember the Serb nation and separate the Bosnian Serbs from their co-nationals in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The Bosnian Communists were therefore forced to counter the possible negative impact on the Serb masses of their policy on the Bosnian question, by a simultaneous, increased rhetorical emphasis on the ideal of Serb unity.

The Third Session of ZAVNOBiH, held on 26–28 April 1945, differed from its precursors in that it was held at a time when Serbia was firmly in Partisan hands, and Siniša Stanković, President of the People's Assembly of Serbia, was invited to give the third speech, to counter Chetnik accusations that the Partisans were destroying Serbdom. He claimed: 'At this moment, the enemies and traitors are spreading lies about the disintegration of Serbdom. To this it can be replied, that never in history has Serbdom been so united as it is today in the free union of equal Yugoslav peoples.' He then paid tribute to the brotherhood in arms of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia:

Serbia will never forget what Bosnia did for her, when, in the difficult and painful days of the occupation, she took in countless fighters from Serbia, when they, under pressure from the enemy, had to transfer their struggle to the other side. Bosnia has put Serbia in her debt, Serbia has put Bosnia in her debt; and all the Yugoslav peoples have mutually put each other in their debt, in order that a legend of the twentieth century be truly created; a legend of the South Slavs, realised in the unity of which all the most noble of the sons of all our peoples have dreamed.<sup>36</sup>

This was a speech that, from the Serb point of view, expressed both halves of the Titoist Yugoslav equation: the individual Yugoslav lands were in brotherhood and were committed to one another as distinct entities, yet simultaneously, the

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Serbs across Yugoslavia were supposedly more united than they had ever been. In his speech at the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia in Belgrade on 12 May 1945, Tito gave a gloss to the KPJ's nationality policy that was most acceptable to Serb national feeling:

Various elements, former writers, scribblers, say that Tito and the Communists have cut up Serbia. Serbia is in Yugoslavia, and we are not intending to set up states within Yugoslavia that will fight among themselves. If Bosnia-Hercegovina is equal, if it has its own federal unit, then we have not dismembered Serbia; rather, we have created happy Serbs in Bosnia, the same as for Croats and Muslims. It is a question of an administrative division. I do not want there to be in Yugoslavia borders that divide; rather, I have hundreds of times stated that I want the borders to be those that join our nations.<sup>37</sup>

Several days later, in his speech in newly liberated Zagreb, Tito stated: 'Those borders, for me to describe them so, need to be something similar to those white lines on a marble pillar.'<sup>38</sup> Tito's words were intended to reassure the Serbs, and the Bosnian leaders likewise employed language that drew upon Serb national sentiment. At a mass rally in Bijeljina on 25 June, presided over by Prime Minister Čolaković and President of the Presidency of the Bosnian Parliament Kecmanović, the latter drew upon the Kosovo myth in order to portray national rebirth under the new government in traditional Serb terms: 'This war was a new Kosovo, but more terrible than that Kosovo of 550 years ago; but it is a war in which we have secured those lasting values of life; values that make a man a man; to which they have always tended in the past.'<sup>39</sup>

Čolaković, probably the most nationally conscious Serb in the Bosnian Communists' Provincial Committee, took the lead in the latter's propaganda efforts to reassure the Bosnian Serb population. The pre-war Serb cultural society 'Prosvjeta' ('Enlightenment') was reestablished in Sarajevo on 15 July, at a gathering of 530 delegates from all over Bosnia-Hercegovina. Čolaković took the opportunity to present to this body representing the Bosnian Serb intelligentsia the NOP victory as a Serb achievement: 'We Serbs of Bosnia-Hercegovina have not only been pioneers of the armed struggle against the occupiers and their collaborators in Bosnia-Hercegovina. We have likewise been the pioneers of the democratic transformation of our country; pioneers of the democratic revolution in Bosnia-Hercegovina.' Responding to the charge that the federal organisation of the new Yugoslavia had dismembered the Serb nation, Čolaković argued: 'Our federal organisation is the faithful production of a democratic principle, and we Serbs—not only in Bosnia-Hercegovina but in all Yugoslavia—we are the pioneers of such a solution to the national question.'<sup>40</sup>

This theme, of squaring the circle and presenting the federal organisation of Yugoslavia as one that was both the work of the Serbs themselves and that best secured their unity, was one to which Čolaković would frequently return. At the Third Session of AVNOJ in August 1945 Čolaković stated: 'Enemies of the Federation frequently parade the argument that the Federation brings into question the security and fate of the Serb nation in Yugoslavia.' He then attempted to meet the argument by turning it around, arguing that the unification of the Serb nation in a centralised, Serbian-dominated kingdom after World War I had been a phoney unity, that had merely turned other Yugoslavs against the Serbs. By contrast, the

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new federative Yugoslavia, based on the equality of the Yugoslav peoples, provided the Serbs with a much more stable and secure unity:

We in Bosnia-Hercegovina do not feel threatened in the slightest. On the contrary, today more than ever, we feel the inseparable bonds that bind us to our brothers in Serbia, our brothers in Croatia and our brothers everywhere where there are Serbs in Yugoslavia. But we, at the same time, also feel fraternal blood ties with all the other peoples of the new Democratic Federative Yugoslavia.<sup>41</sup>

Čolaković elaborated on this theme in a pamphlet written around this time, entitled *On false and true Serbdom*, in which he counterposed what he portrayed as the true Serbdom of the Partisans and the true unity of the Serb people arising from the NOP, with the false Serbdom of the Nedićites and Chetniks, based on chauvinism towards other Yugoslavs and collaboration with the occupiers. Čolaković sought to claim for the Partisans the mantle of the Serb patriotic tradition, while also reassuring his readers:

Nobody is thinking of questioning the right of us Serbs outside Serbia to maintain the closest links with our brothers in Serbia, which will enable the most complete and fastest development of the Serb nation. This development can only be rejoiced over by the other nations of Yugoslavia, for it will mean, like the development of its other nations, the strengthening of our common homeland—Yugoslavia.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, in Čolaković's view, the establishment of the Yugoslav federation had resolved the conflict between the Yugoslav nations, so that the unity of each meant the unity of all; and this made Serb unity secure.

### *The Constituent Assembly of Yugoslavia*

Following the appointment of the Tito-Šubašić government and the final liberation of the country the Communists moved rapidly to legitimise their rule and convert the provisional organs of state into permanent ones. The Third Session of AVNOJ was held from 7 to 26 August 1945 with the principal task of preparing for the holding of elections for the forthcoming Constituent Assembly. AVNOJ elected a Presidency under Ivan Ribar, with six vice-presidents and two secretaries, wherein Bosnia-Hercegovina was represented by Avdo Humo as Vice President and the former Domdo officer Omer Gluhić as Secretary. AVNOJ then transformed itself into the 'Provisional People's Assembly' and passed a series of laws enabling the Constituent Assembly to be held. The government included a Ministry of the Constituent Assembly headed by Edvard Kardelj, which was tasked with laying the ground for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly and the drafting of the constitution. On 15 September the Ministry's Constitutional Commission held its first session, at which the fundamental principles of the future constitution were laid out. Over the next six weeks the Constitutional Commission debated and worked on the draft constitution which was to be put before the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the government.

These events took place against the backdrop of steadily worsening relations between the Communists and their reluctant collaborators from the ranks of the pre-war mainstream political parties. During the summer and autumn of 1945 the

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Democratic politician Milan Grol and the HSS politicians Ivan Šubašić and Juraj Šutej resigned from the coalition government, abandoning their efforts to work with the Communists. The Communists had early on planned to stage-manage the elections; in February 1945 the Central Committee sent a directive to the Provincial Committee for Bosnia:

It would be politically appropriate to allow all organisations to put forward their own independent lists in the elections. This above all for the sake of the outside world and in relation to the various civic parties that are reflected in an independent appearance in the elections. But this purely theoretically; in reality, it is necessary immediately after that to summon a session of the Front and resolve in favour of a unified list, thereby making every other list redundant.<sup>43</sup>

The regime's manipulation of the organisation of the election for the Constituent Assembly, and its harassment and sabotage of the campaign of the opposition, led the latter to boycott the election, so that it was little more than a formality that set the seal on the emergence of a dictatorship.

The Bosnian Communists, for their part, mobilised electoral enthusiasm for the Yugoslav project by emphasising Bosnia's centrality to it. In a speech at an election rally in Sarajevo on 11 October Humo paid tribute to his homeland as the place where the new Yugoslavia was born:

We Bosnians and Hercegovinians are happy that our Bosnia-Hercegovina has been not only the seat of the most ferocious battles in Yugoslavia, but the cradle of the new brotherhood and unity in our country... Bosnia created its army, which fought not only for the freedom of Bosnia, it fought for our great fatherland, Yugoslavia. Our units fought not only on the territory of Bosnia-Hercegovina, but across the whole of Yugoslavia... Our units, in unison with Serbian, Montenegrin and other units, created brotherhood and unity among the peoples... from that blood, from that battle, the new democratic people's Yugoslavia was born.<sup>44</sup>

The Provisional People's Assembly was dissolved on 26 October and the following day the Constituent Assembly was convened for 29 November. Elections were held on 11 November, with the Yugoslav electorate offered a choice between dropping their ballots in the box for the Communist-dominated 'People's Front' list or in the 'box without a list' that represented the opposition. Inevitably, the result was a landslide victory for the People's Front: 88.66 per cent of the electorate voted, with 90.45 per cent voting for the People's Front and 9.52 per cent for the box without a list. Nevertheless, Tito took the trouble to visit Sarajevo and address a pre-election mass rally there, to acknowledge the sacrifices made by Bosnia-Hercegovina during the war and assure the Bosnians of their equal place in the new federal Yugoslavia.<sup>45</sup>

Although the Communists hardly respected the principle of electoral choice, they did respect the principle of multinational equality in the form in which they organised the Constituent Assembly. The latter was elected on a two-tier system, with two separate chambers: a 'Federal Assembly' representing Yugoslavia as a whole and an 'Assembly of Peoples' representing the federal units, including the autonomous entities of Vojvodina and Kosovo-Metohija. In the Assembly of Peoples, each federal unit had a list of candidates, with Čolaković representing the



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Bosnian list. In the Federal Assembly the Communists' favourite Muslim figure-head, Sulejman Filipović, was chosen as one of two vice-presidents, though he subsequently resigned and his place was taken by Humo. The Constituent Assembly opened on 29 November with a declaration establishing the new state: 'Democratic Federative Yugoslavia is proclaimed a people's republic under the name "Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia". The Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia is a federal people's state of republican form; a union of equal peoples that have freely expressed their wish to remain united in Yugoslavia.'<sup>46</sup> The monarchy was abolished and the Karađorđević dynasty dispossessed of all power. Each assembly approved the declaration separately, after which they all came together to approve it jointly. In this way, the republics played an integral, constitutive role in the establishment of the new state.

Kardelj, as Minister for the Constituent Assembly, presented the draft constitution to the latter on 1 December. On the same day, the Constituent Assembly elected a Presidency, with Ribar again as President and one vice-president for each republic; Pucar represented Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Constituent Assembly elected a Constitutional Council, tasked with approving the draft constitution to put before the delegates. The Constituent Assembly then adjourned on 6 December for the long Christmas break, reconvening on 15 January 1946. Two days later Pijade announced that the Constitutional Council had finalised the draft. On this occasion, he reemphasised the sovereign rights of the republics: 'The People's Republics are guaranteed their sovereign rights; they have every possibility for their national development and progress. They can, with complete freedom, feel master in their own homes. They are secured from any attempt that would reduce their national freedom and sovereign rights.'<sup>47</sup> Each chamber thereupon received the draft constitution for discussion and to propose amendments. Perhaps the most significant amendment adopted by the Chamber of Peoples, so far as the national question was concerned, was the following: 'In the third paragraph, under the title "Fundamental rights of the peoples and People's Republics", will be added to Clause 12 a new position, which will read: "The borders of the People's Republics cannot be changed without their consent."' Josip Hrnčević, as Reporter for the Chamber, explained this as follows:

Comrades, out of loyalty to the sovereignty of the People's Republics within the FNRJ [Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia], and to the duty of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia to defend the sovereignty of all the People's Republics; to defend their security; to defend their democratic order; it was necessary that the Constitution also guarantee the sovereignty of the People's Republics, by the fact that the borders of the People's Republics cannot be changed without their consent.<sup>48</sup>

Following extensive discussion, on 28–29 January the two chambers voted separately to approve each clause of the constitution. Amendments were made to the text of the constitution by each chamber on the 30 January, and then each one voted in favour of the Draft and presented its version of the text on the same day to the others, suggesting that it be adopted. Since both chambers had produced identical versions of the constitution, each approved the other by acclamation. On 31 January the two chambers came together to declare that the constitution had been accepted by both chambers; the joint Assembly then formally promulgated

the constitution. The Assembly then voted to continue its work as the 'People's Assembly of the FNRJ'.

The Constitution of the FNRJ defined the state as follows: 'The Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia is a federal state of republican form; a union of equal peoples; that have, on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, expressed their desire to live in a federative state.' The Constitution guaranteed the sovereignty of the republics within the Federation: 'The sovereignty of the People's Republics, within the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, is limited only by the rights which this Constitution gives to the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia protects and defends the sovereign rights of the People's Republics.' Furthermore: 'The borders of the People's Republics cannot be changed without their consent.'<sup>49</sup> The early drafts of the constitution had, indeed, explicitly guaranteed the republics the right of secession. According to the first draft of the Ministry of the Constituent Assembly's Constitutional Commission: 'Yugoslavia arose through the voluntary unification of its republics, which retain the right to secede.' This was then modified in the second draft to 'The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is a voluntary union of its republics, which retain the right to secede from the Federation.'<sup>50</sup> However, this was toned down somewhat in the final version, which implied the right to secede without spelling it out explicitly.

Clause 44 of the Constitution reserved for the Federation jurisdiction over the following: all aspects of the Constitution; the acceptance of new federal members; territorial demarcation between the republics; international diplomacy and trade; war, peace and defence; federal transport and communications; citizenship; the high judiciary; and all economic areas of interest to the federation as a whole. All other areas were under the jurisdiction of the republics. Within the Federation as a whole, sovereignty was represented by the People's Assembly of the FNRJ, which was divided into two chambers: a Federal Council elected by all citizens of the FNRJ and representing the Yugoslav population as a whole; and a Council of Peoples elected by the federal units, with each republic electing thirty delegates, each autonomous province twenty and each autonomous *oblast* fifteen. The two chambers were considered equal.<sup>51</sup> The sovereign rights of the republics were therefore represented at the highest level of state.

On the basis of the new Yugoslav constitution, the People's Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina passed a law in February 1946, renaming 'Federated Bosnia-Herzegovina' the 'People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' (NR BiH).<sup>52</sup> The stage was now set for the drafting and promulgation of a constitution for the latter.

## *Did Bosnia-Herzegovina have the right to secede from Yugoslavia?*

The most important figure in the process that led to the promulgation of a Bosnian constitution was Čolaković, who headed the 'Party Commission for the Construction of the People's Government', which was the KPJ body that advised the Provincial Committee of the KPJ for Bosnia-Herzegovina on all matters relating to the preparations for the drafting of the constitution. As President of the Government (Prime Minister) of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Čolaković was also officially in charge of organising the drafting of the constitution and the convening

of a Constituent Assembly, and had authority over the 'Department for the Construction of the People's Government', headed by Dušan Josipović. This was a subcommittee subordinate to Čolaković's office, which was responsible for all expert business related to the preparation of the constitution and to which was attached a group of experts in constitutional law. On 11 April 1946 Čolaković appointed a 'Commission for the Preparation of the Draft Constitution of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The task of the Commission, which was to work directly under Čolaković's guidance, was to prepare a draft constitution for approval by the government, which would then be submitted by the government to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>53</sup>

The Commission discussed various different possible clauses and versions of clauses for the constitution. An insight into the way the Bosnian Communists viewed their new state is provided by a commentary on an early draft of the first several clauses. The commentary was written some time between April and early November and appears to have been the work of a senior Bosnian Communist, quite possibly Čolaković himself; certainly it suggests a constitutional viewpoint that was orthodox Communist with a Serb orientation. The commentator criticised the draft for overstressing the sovereign aspects of Bosnian statehood and appeared concerned to keep the Bosnian republic's sovereign rights within well-prescribed limits.

According to Clause 2 of the draft:

The People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina associates itself voluntarily with the People's Republic of Serbia, the People's Republic of Croatia; the People's Republic of Slovenia; the People's Republic of Macedonia; and the People's Republic of Montenegro, in a union of equal peoples, the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

On this basis, the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina guarantees to the highest organs of state government and state administration of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia the rights and duties contained in Clause 44 of the Constitution of the FNRJ. Outside the framework of Clause 44 of the Constitution of the FNRJ, the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina maintains full sovereignty and executes state government independently.<sup>54</sup>

Although the documentary evidence is slightly unclear, it appears that the commission of experts offered two variants of this clause, in the second of which, the first sentence of the second paragraph was omitted. The commentator gave an explanation in favour of the second variant and did so by criticising and rejecting the omitted sentence. In the version of the draft that was eventually put before the Constituent Assembly, however, both paragraphs had been removed in favour of one that emphasised the voluntary character of Bosnia's association with the Federation less explicitly, in favour of an emphasis upon Bosnia's desire to unite with the other republics in the common Yugoslav state. The commentator's criticisms of the second paragraph may therefore be taken as representative of his criticism of the entire thrust of the draft's Clause 2, as reproduced above.

According to the commentator the representatives of the peoples of Yugoslavia had already at the Second Session of AVNOJ resolved, on the basis of self-determination, to unite in a federation in which Bosnia-Herzegovina would be an equal member; before that, at the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, the representatives

of Bosnia-Hercegovina had resolved to form a new Democratic Federative Yugoslavia in conjunction with the other Yugoslav peoples. The decisions of the Second Session of AVNOJ, establishing Yugoslavia, were then ratified by the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH. Bosnia-Hercegovina's membership of the federative Yugoslav state had therefore already been determined by the Partisan assemblies of 1943–44, and the Yugoslav Constitution of 1946 had merely confirmed this. According to the commentator: 'Our Constitution needs similarly to express the fact of the voluntary association of our People's Republic with the other state-members in an equal union of peoples, the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. This is, indeed, done in the first statement of Clause 2 of this draft.' However:

To achieve the purpose of the union and to make possible a common state life, it is natural and necessary for the state-members, who are in principle sovereign, to surrender their sovereign right definitely to that union. That voluntary limiting of their own sovereignty was carried out by all members by joint decision, through enacting the federal Constitution which, in Clause 44, enumerates the rights ceded to the supervision of the FNRJ.

Consequently, the commentator interpreted the first paragraph of Clause 2 as explicitly ceding sovereignty to the Federation and the second sentence of the second paragraph as retaining, for the Bosnian Republic, sovereignty in all fields not specifically assigned to the Federation by the Yugoslav Constitution.<sup>55</sup>

The commentator, nevertheless, criticised the assertion of the first sentence of the second paragraph, that 'the People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina guarantees to the highest organs of state government and state administration of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia the rights and duties contained in Clause 44 of the Constitution of the FNRJ', as being 'in conflict with the concept of the sovereignty of the Federal state'. The commentator argued:

To prescribe, that the state members guarantee the execution of rights by the Federal state, would be to begin from the standpoint, that the Federal state is incapable of doing that itself; that it is not sovereign; or to deem that the basis of the Federal state is an agreement of an international legal character, which is not the case, for that is the characteristic of a state union/confederation, and not of a federal state/federation'.<sup>56</sup>

The commentator wished to make clear that in the act of uniting with the other Yugoslav peoples in a federation the Bosnians had surrendered their sovereignty to that federation, though they retained sovereignty in all fields outside federal competence.

While the commentator criticised the draft Clause 2 on the basis of constitutional theory, he was somewhat more pragmatic in his rejection of the more controversial draft Clause 3, according to which: 'The People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina retains the right to withdraw from the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.' The commentator noted that Clause 1 of the Yugoslav constitution made clear that the FNRJ had been formed on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, so that 'it could be concluded that the right to secede is not excluded'. However, the commentator argued:

it is known that the framer of the Constitution used as its source the text of the Constitution of the USSR, in which Clause 17 *expressis verbis* formalises the right of the republics

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to secede from the union. The framers of the Constitution were, beyond any doubt, aware of this fact, and still did not decide to prescribe this right specifically.

The commentator concluded, therefore, that ‘the framer of the Constitution introduced the words: “on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession”, as a historical reminiscence on the birth of the state, but did not intend to formalise the right to secede or to withdraw’.<sup>57</sup>

The commentator did not dispute the right of republics to secede; he merely believed that they should not be allowed to exercise this right and in this way he justified the difference between the Soviet and the Yugoslav constitutions on the question of secession:

Stalin’s Constitution, which dates from 1936, was promulgated at a time when socialism in the Soviet Union had triumphed, and when the cohesive forces of the state had grown to the extent that it was possible, without any fear for the integrity of the state, to formalise the right to withdraw.

By contrast:

Our Constitution was promulgated not even a full year after the establishment of the state, at a time when our state had still not even signed a treaty with our former enemies. However strong the tendency of our peoples was for a unification for which they had sacrificed millions of lives, nevertheless our state life was in its initial phase; its cohesive strength had still not grown to the extent that it could wholly paralyse the centrifugal forces which could arise through historical inertia. There is no doubt that our state, too, will in the course of its development reach the level of consolidation and stability that the Soviet Union achieved in 1936, because there exist objective conditions for this, but at the time of the promulgation of our Constitution, it was perhaps too early expressly to formalise the right of republics to secede from the federation, although this right undoubtedly stems from the right of self-determination.<sup>58</sup>

This somewhat cynical argument—that the right to secede should be recognised only when there was no chance that it would actually be exercised—represented the traditional Marxist-Leninist strategy of recognising ‘bourgeois-democratic’ rights in principle, while overriding them whenever the interests of the revolution were at stake.

The commentator made the additional argument: ‘Insofar as the framer of the Constitution recognised the right to self-determination and secession in Clause One, he recognised it for the nations and not for the republics’.<sup>59</sup> This was tendentious, for although it was true that Clause 1 of the Yugoslav Constitution had described the Yugoslav nations, rather than the republics, as having ‘on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, expressed their desire to live in a federative state’, yet the Constitution of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the form in which it was eventually promulgated, made clear that this Republic was a ‘People’s State’, that:

expressing, on the basis of the right to self-determination including the right to secession and to unification with other nations, the free will of its people regardless of nationality and religion, unites on the basis of the principle of equality with the People’s Republic of Serbia, the People’s Republic of Croatia, the People’s Republic of Montenegro, the People’s

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Republic of Macedonia and the People's Republic of Slovenia in a common, federal state—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>60</sup>

Thus whereas the Yugoslav constitution described the nations of Yugoslavia coming together on the basis of self-determination, in the Bosnian constitution it was the Bosnian Republic that had come together with other republics on this basis and, furthermore, it had done so as an expression of the 'free will of its people'. Who these people were was not further specified: the Bosnian constitution made no mention whatsoever of the Serbs, Croats and Muslims. So while the Yugoslav constitution described the right to self-determination as being exercised by the nations, without mentioning the republics, the Bosnian constitution described the right of self-determination as being exercised by the republic according to the will of its people—a people that was not defined as comprising different national categories. At the same time, the Bosnian constitution was an integral part of the overall Yugoslav constitution.

Taken as a whole, therefore, the Yugoslav constitutional system did not divorce the nations from the republics and counterpose one to the other but, on the contrary, described the republics as the expression of the national will. As Čolaković put it on the occasion of the promulgation of the Bosnian Constitution on 31 December 1946: 'The state has become the people, and the people the state.'<sup>61</sup> The constitutions of other People's Republics, indeed, stated that their respective peoples had united with the other peoples and republics. Thus, for example, Clause 2 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Serbia stated:

the Serb people has united, on the basis of equality, with the other peoples of Yugoslavia and their people's republics: the People's Republic of Croatia; the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the People's Republic of Montenegro; the People's Republic of Macedonia; and the People's Republic of Slovenia, in a common, federal state—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>62</sup>

Similar formulas were adopted by the constitutions of the People's Republics of Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro.<sup>63</sup> To have interpreted the right of the nations to self-determination as overriding the republics, or conversely the rights of the republics as overriding the nations, would have been to insert a contradiction into the very heart of the Yugoslav constitution—a contradiction that the original authors had not envisaged. Rather, the rights of the nations and republics dovetailed: self-determination for the nations meant self-determination for the republics. The commentator admitted as much when he argued in his prior comparison between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, as noted above, that 'the right of republics to secede from the federation... undoubtedly stems from the right of self-determination'. The commentator's contradictory arguments nevertheless served to delete the clause recognising Bosnia's right to withdraw from the Federation.

The views of the commentator, whether purely personal or representative of the opinion of high-ranking Bosnian Communists, were not ones that could be expressed publicly. An official public explanation of Bosnia-Herzegovina's relationship to the Yugoslav federation, and of the locus of sovereignty, was provided by Dušan Šakota, the Bosnian Government's Commissioner for Questions Relat-

ing to the Draft Constitution, in an article in the newspaper *Sarajevski Dnevnik* ('Sarajevo Daily') on 19 November 1946. According to Šakota: 'In the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, all government comes from the people and belongs to the people.' Legitimacy did not derive from tradition but from the struggle against the occupiers, which had wiped the slate clean and enabled the people to take power: 'The People's Liberation Struggle erased all other forms of government and recognises the people's government alone as its form of government.' The people exercised their rule through the representative institutions established by the NOP: 'The new government in Bosnia-Herzegovina has, therefore, new organisational forms—People's Councils of the localities, towns, districts and *okrugs*, as well as the People's Assembly of the People's Republic. Through them, the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina exercise their government.'

Bosnia-Herzegovina's sovereignty was confirmed by its Constitution:

Because it has formulated the statehood of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Constitution has, in a clear way, confirmed that, through the freely expressed will of its people, the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina has united with the other people's republics in a federal state—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

According to Šakota, sovereignty began with the republics and was then transferred to the Federation:

Our Federation was established in order to resolve the national question. Thus, that the principle of the Federation has been consistently realised is manifested in the fact that the People's Republics are sovereign states. They are limited only in the rights that the peoples of Yugoslavia have, through their own decision, transferred to the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The transfer of these rights was necessary to achieve economic and political cooperation and the reciprocal assistance of the people's republics; their common defence, state security and independence; and with the goal of a unified democratic manner of state and social order of all the People's Republics in the composition of the FNRJ. Other than these most important affairs of importance to all the peoples, exercised through the Federal government in the general interest, the People's Republics exercise their government independently, maintaining their sovereignty.<sup>64</sup>

According to Šakota's interpretation, therefore, it was the People's Republics that were sovereign and embodied their peoples' sovereign rights, while the Federation was an expression not of popular sovereignty but of the common interests of its sovereign members, which voluntarily surrendered aspects of their sovereignty to it. Šakota stressed, furthermore, that the Federation was a federation of the republics as well as of the peoples, created by the former but comprised of the latter:

As a fruit of the struggle, the peoples of Yugoslavia, on the basis of the free determination of the peoples themselves, created a union of equal peoples—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, which is made up of the People's Republics. They enjoy sovereign rights, and are limited only by those rights that they have voluntarily transferred to the common organs of state government and state administration.<sup>65</sup>

Šakota's interpretation of the Yugoslav union was therefore close to the confederal model that the above-mentioned commentator had explicitly repudiated. The difference in opinion between two high-ranking officials who were working



closely together may, at one level, have represented a divergence between the official viewpoint, as represented by Šakota, and the way senior Communists really saw things. It is more likely, however, that the provisions of the Yugoslav constitutional arrangement were left deliberately vague to reconcile the contradictory views of the myriad supporters of the NOP; consequently, they were open to different interpretations. The unnamed commentator may have been Čolaković, who may have been expressing his personal opinion; equally, another high-ranking Bosnian Communist with strong views, such as Avdo Humo, might have interpreted the constitutional arrangement in a wholly different manner. The question of whether Bosnia-Hercegovina did indeed possess the right to secede from Yugoslavia was left sufficiently vague to provide arguments for both sides in the war that broke out in 1992, when Bosnia-Hercegovina did, indeed, declare its independence.

### *The Bosnian Constituent Assembly opens*

The process by which a Constituent Assembly for Bosnia-Hercegovina was elected and convened and a Bosnian constitution approved was drawn out and involved several stages. Although the outcome was a foregone conclusion, given that everything significant was decided by the Communist leadership, the latter set a lot of store on the formal procedure, which was intended not only to convince the outside world and the Bosnian population of the propriety of the whole process, but also to popularise the constitution among the Bosnian people and thereby strengthen the new state.

A 'Country Meeting of the Representatives of the People's Councils' of Bosnia-Hercegovina was held on 24 June 1946, at which Josipović announced: 'Before us lie the elections for the Constituent Assembly in Bosnia-Hercegovina, which will pass the fundamental laws of our republic—the Constitution, and all other fundamental laws.'<sup>66</sup> The People's Assembly of Bosnia-Hercegovina reopened on 14 August with the task of discussing and approving the laws relating to the Constituent Assembly and the elections for it. On this occasion, Boro Knežić, a member of the Legislative Council of the Presidency, announced:

Successes achieved on the economic-political and cultural-social fields enable today the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina, in the spirit of the Constitution of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, to realise their sovereign rights, via their freely elected supreme organs of state authority, to pass the fundamental Law of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina. That sovereign right of the peoples of Bosnia-Hercegovina was achieved already in the course of the People's Liberation Struggle, through enormous losses and inconceivable suffering under the highly raised flag of the brotherhood and unity of our peoples. The promulgation of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina will only confirm the existence of these, their sovereign rights.<sup>67</sup>

According to the official view of the Bosnian authorities, therefore, the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina possessed sovereign rights that had been won through their struggle in the NOP, and that were now being confirmed in the Constituent Assembly.

The same point was made by another speaker, People's Delegate Boro Popović, on the day that the law for the election to the Constituent Assembly was passed.

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Popović spoke of the 'exploitative policy that the Great Serbian hegemonists had waged in Bosnia with the assistance of the corrupt Serb, Croat and Muslim reaction', who 'together created discord among the people so as to plunder more easily', thereby 'impoverishing the people in a rich country'. Nevertheless:

In the course of the People's Liberation Struggle, the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina destroyed their dark past, and in brotherhood and unity achieved their sovereignty, which is confirmed by the laws on the Constituent Assembly and on the election of People's Delegates, passed by the People's Assembly of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>68</sup>

A 'Law on the Constitutional Assembly of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' was passed by the presidency of the Bosnian parliament on 16 August, laying out the procedure that the Constituent Assembly would follow.<sup>69</sup> The People's Assembly of Bosnia-Herzegovina was dissolved on 27 September and the elections for the Constituent Assembly were held on 13 October. The elections were the occasion of a patriotic mobilisation on the part of the authorities. Vojo Ljujić, secretary of the People's Front of Sarajevo, a Serb and a former Partisan commander, wrote in *Sarajevski Dnevnik* on 8 October:

According to the statutes of the Federal constitution, the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina has its own Constitution, People's Assembly and its own government, which in fact guarantees its sovereignty. Nobody gave this to us, nor has it even been given to us in history. Our history is full of difficult pages of slavery under Hungary, Turkey and Austria-Hungary. It is the history of colonial exploitation of slaves and peasants; the exploitation of the riches of our country, mines, forests, cattle and—most importantly—the human workforce. But it is also the history of a people that has always fought for its freedom, justice and statehood.

This struggle, continued through the period of oppression by the 'Great Serbian rulers' under the Yugoslav kingdom, had reached its culmination in the resistance to the Axis occupiers:

In the struggle for survival, once again in all its strength was born the aspiration for freedom and for the independent statehood of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and this aspiration our people carried and developed through the struggle, establishing at once a granite foundation for its achievement. Nobody has given us the freedom we have today, nor has anyone given us our statehood. We achieved it in struggle and it is ours.<sup>70</sup>

On this patriotic basis, Ljujić summoned the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina to participate in the elections.

One hundred and fifty-five delegates were elected, of whom approximately fifty were Muslims. On 23 October, the People's Assembly of Bosnia-Herzegovina summoned the Constituent Assembly to begin work on 11 November. On 4 November the Draft Constitution was approved by the People's Government. The Commission for the Preparation of the Draft Constitution had consulted senior officials of the Yugoslav government responsible for constitutional affairs to ensure that the Bosnian Constitution would be in keeping with the Yugoslav Constitution; these officials submitted their last set of corrections, all of them fairly minor, to the People's Government on 7 November.<sup>71</sup> The Constituent Assembly opened on 11 November and on the same or the next day Čolaković,

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as President of the Government, submitted the Draft Constitution to the Presidency of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>72</sup>

The Constituent Assembly was opened by Osman Karabegović as Vice-President of the People's Assembly of Bosnia-Hercegovina. Husnija Kurt, Secretary of the People's Assembly, read the latter's decree summoning the Constituent Assembly. The veteran HSS politician Jakov Grgurić, as the oldest delegate, then assumed the role of acting President of the Constituent Assembly. In his speech he stated: 'In the framework of this union [the FNRJ], our Bosnia-Hercegovina has received its statehood, its sovereignty; it has become an equal member with the other federated republics in the common state, the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Marshal Tito.' The Constituent Assembly would, said Grgurić, confirm this 'historical fact'.<sup>73</sup> On 12 November the Assembly ratified the membership of 149 delegates, including nine deputy delegates who substituted for those who had been elected to more than one seat. Six of the elected delegates were absent, though some would arrive later. The Assembly then elected a Presidency consisting of Čazim Ugljen as President, Dejan Vujašinić as Vice-President and Rudi Kolak and Rade Jakšić as Secretaries. According to Ugljen's opening speech:

our immediate homeland Bosnia-Hercegovina has, for the first time in its history, gained its sovereignty, its statehood within the framework of the fraternal union of peoples, the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, through which is realised the centuries-old aspiration of the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina, for which our peoples have never in their history fought as heroically and in such unison as on this occasion.<sup>74</sup>

The Constituent Assembly resolved in favour of sending a greeting to Tito that included the following pledge:

Bosnia-Hercegovina was, in the war, among the first in the struggle for liberation; she did not flinch from any kind of sacrifice and effort to achieve your great ideas; and today, in the period of peace, Bosnia-Hercegovina will likewise, with all her strength, work to realise the programme of renewal and construction of our country.<sup>75</sup>

The following day, the Constituent Assembly elected a Presidium with powers to override the People's Government, in the event that the latter engaged in acts contrary to Yugoslav or Bosnian law. The Presidium was selected to represent a balance between the nationalities and between Communists and non-Communists: Pucar as President; Grgurić as First Vice-President; Šarac as Second Vice-President; Mastilović as Third Vice-President; Kurt as Secretary; and a membership that included such luminaries as Ivo Andrić, subsequently the winner of the 1961 Nobel Prize in Literature, who up till then had had no significant relationship with the NOP in Bosnia-Hercegovina. This was followed by the election of a similarly composed Constitutional Council, whose task it was to examine the draft constitution presented to it by the People's Government and produce a final version for approval by the Assembly. Vaso Butozan was elected President of the Constitutional Council, with Džemal Bijedić as Vice-President and Dušan Josipović as Secretary. On behalf of the People's Government, Čolaković appointed Dušan Šakota as the Government's Commissioner for Questions Relating to the Draft Constitution. Šakota's task would be to explain the draft before the Assem-

bly.<sup>76</sup> Čolaković then tendered the resignation of the People's Government on the grounds that the People's Assembly that had empowered it no longer existed, but the Constituent Assembly rejected the Government's resignation and voted to extend its term of office until the Constitution had been promulgated. The Assembly then adjourned to allow the Constitutional Council to work upon the draft constitution in detail.

In the days following the adjournment of the Constituent Assembly the Constitutional Council examined and approved the draft constitution. On 23 November Butozan, as President of the Council, noted that 'numerous individual suggestions on individual clauses of the draft constitution have reached the Council, which demonstrates that, among the broad popular masses, there is the greatest interest in the promulgation of our republican constitution'. Consequently, Butozan proposed that the draft constitution 'be put up to a discussion of the general public, and that the Council discuss all the proposals and suggestions that arrive from the people, besides those that the members of the Constitutional Council will submit'. Consequently, 'the Constitutional Council sends an invitation to all citizens of our Republic, to take part in the general popular discussion of the draft constitution of the P[eople's] R[epublic] of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina]'.<sup>77</sup>

The draft constitution was therefore distributed to all public organisations and societies for them to disseminate it among the public and solicit opinions and proposals. This was to be carried out in group readings and discussions at the local level. Of course, the Communists did not genuinely intend to make significant changes to the draft on the basis of public proposals; rather, the purpose of this exercise was to popularise the Constitution among the citizenry and legitimise it as an expression of the popular will, so strengthening the new order. As *Sarajevski Dnevnik* argued in its announcement of the public discussion:

The people that creates its own fundamental law will be the best guardian and most faithful defender of those tenets contained in the Constitution. On the day that our Constituent Assembly ratifies our Constitution, it will be able to say with justice that it is carrying out the people's will; that the Constitution is such as is desired by the broadest popular masses of our Republic.<sup>78</sup>

### *The Bosnian coat of arms and flag*

The question of the official coat of arms and flag of the new Bosnian state was not discussed by the Communist leadership at the sessions of ZAVNOBiH nor during the course of the NOP. Since the Partisans in Bosnia-Herzegovina had employed as their coat of arms the same Communist red, five-pointed star as those in the other Yugoslav lands, and since they had fought under a tricolour that was a variant of the Serbian and Croatian flags, they had no appropriate ready-made symbols on which to draw when it came to devising a specifically Bosnian coat of arms and flag after the war. This lent to the process of choosing a coat of arms and flag, which took place simultaneously with the drafting of the constitution, a somewhat arbitrary and abstract character, in which Communist ideological concerns took precedence over popular patriotic feeling. Other Yugoslav republics received coats of arms and flags that reflected their national traditions: the People's Republic of Croatia received a coat of arms containing the five-by-five red and

silver chequerboard; the People's Republic of Serbia received a coat of arms containing the four C-shaped flint-stones; and both Croatia and Serbia received flags containing their national tricolours. Bosnia-Herzegovina, by contrast, received a coat of arms and flag that reflected only the precepts of the Bosnian Communism that substituted for the non-existent Bosnian nationalism; the glue that bound the Bosnian peoples together.

The early draft of the Bosnian constitution offered three alternative options each for the coat of arms and the flag. All three suggested coats of arms were round and boarded by two curved sheaves of corn and involved the motif of a field as background. The first showed a flag held by three hands representing the three Bosnian peoples and bearing the words 'Brotherhood and Unity'. According to the above-mentioned anonymous commentator, this emphasised 'brotherhood and unity as the idea which is also specifically written on the flag'. The second coat of arms showed a hearth with a flame, which apparently represented 'the domestic hearth that is defended with equal love by Serbs, Muslims and Croats' and 'symbolises the homeland of Bosnia-Herzegovina', with 'the flame on the hearth representing the ardour with which the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina bore losses for her in the past, and with which they intend to safeguard her in the future'. The third showed the outline of the mountains of Kozara, before which lay three factory chimneys; this represented 'the aspiration of the heroic country to a happy and progressive future'.<sup>79</sup> Very little of this symbolism, of course, was specifically applicable to Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, all three coats of arms also bore the date 'I.VII.1944' in the corner—the date at which, during the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH, the Bosnian state was formally founded.

The same abstract symbolism was apparent in the three suggested versions of the flag. The first was an adaptation of Yugoslavia's blue-white-red tricolour, with a red star in the corner bearing the initials 'NRBiH' ['People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina']; this represented 'the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina, in its ethnographic composition, is Yugoslavia in miniature'. The second flag was all-red, with a gold star in the corner bearing the initials 'NRBiH'; the intention of this was 'in one colour, to show the unity of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats, who forget their national differences and look only toward their happy, common future'. The third flag involved a tricolour that, half way across, reversed the order of its colours: from the flagpole to the centre it ran red-blue-white (the Serbian tricolour), and from the centre to the edge it ran red-white-blue (the Croatian tricolour), with a red star in the centre. This version 'considers the national sensitivity of the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and respects the colours they have borne up till now; happily, a five-pointed red star joins them into a common flag'.<sup>80</sup> All three flags therefore treated Bosnia-Herzegovina simply as an element in the Yugoslav, Serbo-Croat and Communist equations.

The commentator made a revealing comment on the flags: 'Bosnia-Herzegovina, after the collapse of the Bosnian kingdom in 1463, has had no independent state life, so in the flag there is no need to respect any kind of Bosnia-Herzegovinian historicism, as some other republics will most likely do'.<sup>81</sup> Unlike the Communist leaders of other republics, the Bosnian Communists faced the difficulty, in constructing a patriotic identity for their state, of there being no shared national past their citizens could jointly celebrate. The Catholic Bosnian medieval kingdom

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had significant popular resonance only for the Bosnian Croats, among whom the kingdom survived in folk memory and whose Franciscan friaries were the only remaining institution that dated back to medieval Bosnia. It was the Ottoman destruction of that kingdom that laid the basis for the emergence of Muslim and Serb nationalities, through Islamisation and Orthodox migration from Serbia and other parts of the Balkans respectively, so that for neither community did the Bosnian medieval kingdom have much emotional significance—despite the efforts of some Serb intellectuals to claim this kingdom as part of the Serb or Yugoslav national heritage. The League of Farmers politician Branko Čubrilović, at the Bosnian Constituent Assembly in December 1946, spoke of '[King] Tvrtko's attempts to gather, around the central South Slav land, Bosnia-Hercegovina, all South Slavs', but this was a minority viewpoint.<sup>82</sup> More characteristic was Pucar's dismissal of the medieval Bosnian kingdom at the Second Session of ZAVNO-BiH, as 'a state of feudal lords in which the enserfed Christian subjects toiled for the benefit of a handful of Bosnian magnates'.<sup>83</sup> Hasan Brkić made the point at an election meeting in Sarajevo on 27 September 1946: 'We never in the past had a state that would be the act alike of Serbs, Croats and Muslims. We had in the past



Image 3: The provisional coat-of-arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as published in *Sarajevski Dnevnik*, 19 November 1946.



a Bosnian state, but it has disappeared from our memories and from our traditions, for it was not the work of the people, but a state of the aristocracy.<sup>84</sup> Even the HSS politician Bogomir Brajković, in his speech at the Bosnian Constituent Assembly, spoke of how, '[i]n the misty and insufficiently researched time of the Bosnian bans and kings, the poor Bosnian peasant suffered'—in addition to religious persecution—'from the oppression of his feudal lords'.<sup>85</sup>

The Ottoman era, to which the Muslims were emotionally attached, was likewise viewed by Serbs and Croats as an era of enslavement. The Austro-Hungarian and royal Yugoslav eras were widely viewed in a negative light, the first in particular by Serbs and the latter in particular by Muslims and Croats. The Communists, for their part, tended to equate the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and royal Yugoslav eras as three equivalent periods of foreign oppression. It was therefore very difficult for the new Bosnian authorities to draw upon traditions of state. In his speech on the significance of the elections for the Constituent Assembly, delivered to the People's Assembly on 29 August 1946, Vojislav Kecmanović contrasted these elections with the parliamentary elections held under Austria-Hungary in 1910, which he described as 'modern camouflage' aimed at hiding 'our colonial position under Austria-Hungary'; as something that appeared, to those too young to remember it, as a 'story from a distant, unhappy past'.<sup>86</sup> For the Communists who oversaw the drafting of Bosnia's constitution in 1946, and particularly for the Serb Communists, therefore, there was little in the way of an ideologically acceptable national past that could be incorporated into the symbols of state. All emphasis was on the newness of the Bosnian state and the choice of symbols reflected this. The Bosnian symbols of state would change and evolve over the course of the months leading to the promulgation of the constitution as the Communists and their Bosnian constituents debated them; their story is inseparably bound up with the story of the constitution.

The version of the Draft Constitution received by the Assembly contained some changes to the coat of arms and flag. The coat of arms was now described as follows:

The state coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a field bounded by sheafs of corn. The sheafs are tied at the bottom with a ribbon, on which is written the date '1–VII–1944'. Between the tops of the sheaves is a five-pointed star. In the centre of the field is the outline of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian mountains, and before it a torch held by three hands.

The three hands represented Bosnia-Herzegovina's three peoples, the Serbs, Muslims and Croats. This provisional version of the coat of arms appeared in the newspapers *Oslobođenje* on 17 November and *Sarajevski Dnevnik* on 19 November. So far as the flag was concerned, it was now a modified version of the Yugoslav tricolour, with the difference that it had two stars in the centre, one red and one gold.<sup>87</sup>

According to the account of Josipović, who was Secretary of the Constitutional Council, it was subsequently decided that the provisionally selected version of the coat of arms was unsatisfactory. The incorporation of the date of the historic decision of the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH 'looked as if it was copying that which was contained in the coat of arms of the FNRJ (the date 29 November



1943 [when the new Yugoslavia was founded at the Second Session of AVNOJ])' and it was felt 'that no justification existed for putting that date on the coat of arms'. Furthermore, 'it was apparent that this version of the coat of arms made no reference to the economic riches of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for neither its forest riches nor its orientation toward industry was stressed, and that there was nothing that symbolised the continuity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood'. So far as the central motif of the coat of arms was concerned: The torch held by three hands, as a symbol of the union of Serbs, Muslims and Croats, was liked by many. But in further discussions, feelings cooled towards it—not because of the dilemma that then existed over the national identity of the Muslims, but specifically because the conclusion was reached that it was not usual for something like that to be on the state coat of arms. It was noticeable that in no other republic did a tendency exist to express something similar on the coat of arms'.<sup>88</sup>

There are several reasons to suggest that Josipović's explanation for the abandonment of the three-hands motif is less than sincere. The argument that 'in no other republic did a tendency exist to express something similar on the coat of arms' could have been levelled just as easily against the coat of arms that was ultimately adopted, in which the central motif was of two factory chimneys: not a single other republic adopted a coat of arms whose central motif was an industrial or other economic installation; Croatia and Serbia chose their historic coats of arms; Slovenia and Macedonia chose mountains; Montenegro chose the church of its former ruler, Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš. Thus no other republic saw fit to stress its 'economic riches' or its 'orientation towards industry'. Josipović's claim that the date of ZAVNOBiH's historic decision was dropped to avoid 'copying' the Federal coat of arms appears as a particularly incongruous non sequitur, given the extent to which the various flags and coats of arms of Yugoslavia and its republics followed a similar Communist-inspired pattern. Finally, representation both of Bosnia-Herzegovina's 'forest riches' and of the 'continuity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood' was eventually incorporated into the Bosnian coat of arms through alteration of the borders and background respectively, neither of which necessitated the abandonment of the central motif.

Despite Josipović's disclaimer, therefore, objections over the coat of arms apparently recognising formally the Muslims as a people separate from the Serbs and Croats, raised by voices outside the Bosnian Communist leadership after the publication of the coat of arms, may have led to its replacement. Certainly, Josipović admits, the design with the three hands was retained up until the time that the draft constitution was subjected to public discussion and it was only following this discussion that it was abandoned. Communist philistinism undoubtedly played a part in the choice of two factory chimneys as the central motif of the new coat of arms. Yet both the abandonment of the first coat of arms and the adoption of the second were related to the genuine difficulty faced by the Communists in selecting symbols favourable to all Bosnia-Herzegovina's peoples. There was wide disagreement even over the symbolism of the Bosnian NOP and this became clear in the public discussions following the publication of the draft constitution.

The only behind-the-scenes account of how the Bosnian Communist leadership eventually chose the coat of arms and flag of the NR BiH is provided by Josipović, who recalls that a red flag had initially been rejected out of hand 'almost

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as some kind of impermissible left-wing extremism', since the NR BiH was envisaged as a people's or national rather than as a socialist state. Consequently, the initial idea was to adopt some variant of the Yugoslav blue-white-red tricolour as the Bosnian flag as well, with the five-pointed star in a different position in order to differentiate the Bosnian flag from the Yugoslav: 'The motive for such a solution was that the Yugoslav tricolour with the five-pointed star was our dominant symbol during the People's Liberation Struggle and Revolution, and because the NR BiH was, as was said at the time, Yugoslavia in miniature.' However, since this solution was not very popular, 'there were attempts to find a solution for the flag, along the line of it symbolising the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina was the homeland of Serbs, Muslims and Croats'. Yet this too was ultimately rejected, says Josipović, 'not only because this was technically difficult to express, but because it was not customary to express this through the flag'. The red flag was therefore finally adopted by default:

Consequently, among the majority of those who participated in the discussions over the flag, the idea of a red flag as the most adequate solution for Bosnia-Herzegovina was resuscitated and warmed to, and the proposals during the public discussion went along those lines. Because sometimes, particularly in the Provincial Committee of the KPJ, the discussion of the flag lasted deep into the night, and after people tired, some among them would, as if speaking to themselves, utter 'Brothers, give them the red flag, and all the peoples of this country will be satisfied'. The idea of a red flag was resuscitated particularly because the uprising in many parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina had begun under a red flag, and because the first attacks on the enemy were under that flag. Furthermore, in the course of the war, Bosnia-Herzegovina was the territory on which the most blood was spilled and where the battles were fiercest.<sup>89</sup>

The coat of arms and flag of the Republic were the object of several proposals raised in local discussions on the constitution. *Sarajevski Dnevnik* reported that, at a public conference held at the Youth Hall in Sarajevo on 6 December, 'it was unanimously resolved, following a long discussion, to propose the alteration of Clause 4 of the constitution, in the sense that in the state coat of arms of the People's Republic of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina], a symbol be drawn that would represent the perspective of the industrial development of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina]. Similarly: 'At this conference, a proposal was passed, that a change be inserted in Clause 5, so that the state flag of the NR BiH be red, and that in the top corner of the flag by the pole be the Yugoslav colours with a five-pointed star'.<sup>90</sup>

These proposals were ultimately adopted by the Constitutional Council in their entirety, so it is likely that they were introduced at the initiative of the Communist leadership, using the public conference at Sarajevo as a front. This appears particularly likely since several similar or identical proposals were made at subsequent meetings in Sarajevo. At a discussion on the draft constitution on 10 December, another activist proposed that the flag should be red with a miniature Yugoslav flag in its corner, 'to symbolise the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina is an inseparable part of the FNRJ'. He also suggested that 'the date on the coat of arms be changed, and that instead of 1.VII.1944 be put the date of the uprising of the peoples of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina] on 27 July 1941, because that date is more familiar to our peoples'.<sup>91</sup> At a discussion on 13 December a proposal was made to change the flag to red, 'as a sign and symbol of the blood and suffering

of Bosnia, which gave so much to the NOP', with a miniature Yugoslav flag in the corner, 'as a sign of the ties and unity with the other peoples and republics'; it was also suggested that a factory chimney be introduced to the background of the coat of arms, as 'a symbol of the new Bosnia, which boldly and decisively goes into its future, and of the prosperity that stems from industrialisation and a planned economy of the country'.<sup>92</sup>

On or about 16 December, a conference of graphical workers in Sarajevo resolved in favour of the red flag, since 'the flag of our Republic should be that flag under which our peoples launched the uprising, and under which the brotherhood and unity of our peoples was cemented—and that is the red flag'.<sup>93</sup> At a conference of the General Cooperative Union in Sarajevo on 18 December, a participant proposed that 'on the coat of arms, beside the sheaves of corn, there be introduced a symbol of the future economic development of our country'.<sup>94</sup> At a conference of youth activists in Sarajevo on 19 December, 'One of the youths proposed that, instead of the date of the session of ZAVNOBiH in the coat of arms, there be put the date of the uprising of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina—27 July'.<sup>95</sup> At a conference held at a factory in the industrial suburb of Kreka near Tuzla on or about 22 December, one activist argued that 'our comrades, Serbs, Croats and Muslims, when they went into battle in 1941, did not ask whether the flag will be of three colours, but they fought, deepening brotherhood and unity through struggle; spilling their blood; and for this very reason, our common flag must be red, of the very same colour of that blood that they spilled'. The proposal was enthusiastically and unanimously adopted by the conference.<sup>96</sup>

The Communist leadership had clearly decided to alter the coat of arms and the flag and had therefore orchestrated a public campaign to that end, but there was nevertheless genuine disagreement about which aspects of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its NOP to stress. Another proposal was made at the same conference, 'to change the coat of arms, so that there will be only one hand holding the torch, and in the background there appear forests and factory chimneys, in order to signify the wealth of our republic and the perspective of its industrialisation'.<sup>97</sup> At a meeting of officials of the Public Prosecutor's Office in Sarajevo on or about 12 December, it was also 'resolved unanimously' to propose that 'the state flag of the NR BiH be made up only of one colour—red, with a gold five-pointed star'. The following reason was given: 'Bearing in mind the specific ethnic composition of the NR BiH, as well as its role in the liberation war, we believe that the proposed flag would be the most favourable form for the state flag of the NR BiH'.<sup>98</sup> The character of the symbols proposed and eventually adopted—a red flag and a coat of arms emphasising heavy industry—may also indicate a genuine pressure from rank-and-file Communists for more explicitly Communist imagery.

The Constitutional Council reconvened on 9 December. Vice-President Džemal Bijedić proposed that the date '1.VII.1944' be removed, 'because he believes that it is preferable that the ribbon that binds the sheaves on the coat of arms be without a date, given that there are also other important dates in the history of our People's Liberation Struggle'. This proposal was unanimously approved. At the same time, Butozan notified the Council that 'from the general popular discussion on the Draft Constitution, from the proposals which have been made by trade-union branches and conferences of the citizens, it appears

that the proposed flag will be changed according to the will of the broadest popular masses'.<sup>99</sup>

The Bosnian Communists were nevertheless reluctant to abandon the principle that a red flag was inappropriate to the current stage of political development. Consequently, Josipović recalls, Čolaković consulted Kardelj, as Tito's right-hand man and ideologue, who promised to consider the question, and invited the responsible Bosnian officials to Belgrade to discuss it. Josipović and Šakota consequently travelled to Belgrade to meet with Kardelj, who informed them that the red flag was permissible as symbolic of the spilled blood and the fierceness of the fighting there. However:

He emphasised that, in his opinion, it would be essential for the flag to be designed so that it is clear that Bosnia-Hercegovina is a republic within Yugoslavia; so that its belonging to Yugoslavia is clear. Everything that he set forth, he immediately improvised with a pen and sketched on a piece of paper. Šakota and I, listening to Kardelj, had no reason to comment in any way, for we knew that such a decision on the flag of the NR BiH would be accepted wholeheartedly.

When they returned to Sarajevo, carrying with them Kardelj's sketch, and reported to Čolaković what had taken place, the latter smiled and replied, 'So long as Bevc [Kardelj] says that we can have a red flag, then there will be no problem with that over here. We are all for the red flag.'<sup>100</sup>

Šefket Maglajlić, in the role of President of the General Council of United Trade Unionists, agreed to propose the necessary amendment to the draft constitution. On 12 December, at the final session of the Constitutional Council, Maglajlić suggested an amendment to the clauses of the draft constitution governing the symbols of state. Maglajlić explained that 'in discussions with comrades, he had come to the conclusion that, in the proposed coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the three hands that hold the torch should be erased, because those hands are not executed aesthetically and do not accord with the symbol of unity that the torch expresses'.<sup>101</sup> Maglajlić likewise justified the abandonment of the original flag, on the grounds that 'the flag, as it was proposed, had no particular tradition; it is linked neither to the Serbs, nor to the Muslims, nor to the Croats', while on the other hand 'we have received numerous proposals that changes be brought into the draft constitution and that our flag be red'. The veteran League of Farmers politician Branko Čubrilović argued that 'our peoples launched the uprising under the red flag, and it is equally dear to all of us'. He also drew upon the role of the red flag in Serb national tradition: 'The current Serbian flag was introduced by [Serbian Prince] Miloš Obrenović, but the first Serbian flag was red with a cross. The first Serbian uprising [of 1804] was launched under a red flag. Serbian historians can say that it is precisely the red flag that is the true one.' The veteran Croat intellectual Vladimir Čaldarović argued, by contrast, that 'the red flag is certainly the most beautiful symbol, because Bosnia must be an industrial land of the working people'. The Constitutional Council voted unanimously in favour of the red flag with the miniature Yugoslav flag in its corner.<sup>102</sup> The Constitutional Council then issued its report proposing changes to the draft Constitution; the changes to the coat of arms and flag were the most substantial changes proposed and were almost alone in being adopted right at the very end of the Council's period of activities.<sup>103</sup>

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The final choice of this flag was, it appears, a compromise solution for a country whose nationalities held conflicting national ideologies and in which explicitly Communist imagery may have appeared the safest option. Of course, the Communists sought to rationalise the compromise by attributing to the red flag an important tradition in Bosnian history. At the Bosnian Constituent Assembly on 29 December Maglajlić traced the use of the red flag by Bosnian revolutionaries since the Bosnian uprising of the 1870s, via the birth of the Bosnian labour movement, through the Young Bosnia organisation and the Husino miners' uprising of 1920 and up to the NOP. Maglajlić concluded:

Therefore, the Yugoslav flag in the top corner of our republican red flag precisely expresses the historical and present sides of our reality: That Bosnia-Herzegovina was established as a sovereign republic through the struggle of the people under the red flag, and that it is today continuing to develop in the free union of equal Yugoslav peoples.<sup>104</sup>

So far as the coat of arms was concerned, Josipović similarly recalls the efforts made by the Bosnian Communists to reach a decision and their difficulty in doing so:

The discussion of this became particularly important during the public discussion of the Draft Constitution. Several times, in the building of the Provincial Committee of the KPJ (building no. 1 in today's Boriša Kovačević Street), the entire Provincial Committee assembled with Secretary Đuro Pucar, with the presence of several painters—artists, historians, lawyers and others. There, they looked through various encyclopaedias, constitutions, heraldic commentaries and the like. The attention of everyone was concentrated on the need to express the identity of Bosnia-Herzegovina as successfully as possible: its past, present and what bound together its peoples. Many sketches were made, over which the painters were particularly involved—the artists Voja Dimitrijević and Ismet Mujezinović.

Yet the Bosnian Communists were not deciding in isolation; Josipović recalls: 'Čolaković had several times mentioned that senior Communists in Belgrade, particularly Moša Pijade and Edvard Kardelj, had urged that as much as possible, the coat of arms should express the continuity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood, ultimately taking into account some elements of the old Bosnian coat of arms of King Tvrtko'. Yet the senior Yugoslav Communists did not want this element of Bosnian identity to be overstressed, as Kardelj made clear to Josipović and Šakota during their meeting in Belgrade:

So far as the expression of the continuity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood was concerned, he expressed the belief that it would be good if something adequate could be found (as some of our other republics were doing), but that there was no reason to give this too great an importance. He emphasised that, in this regard, assistance should be sought from historians.<sup>105</sup>

The Bosnian leadership acted according to the instructions it had received from Belgrade. Josipović recalls:

In the role of President of the Government, therefore, Čolaković held several consultations with public workers and experts over the design of the coat-of arms. Among others, the historian Professor Ante Babić was consulted, and the conclusion reached that in the coat of arms of King Tvrtko there were no elements that would have confirmed the identity of

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Bosnia-Herzegovina, for all the coats of arms from that period were the coats-of-arms of individual magnates. However, it was concluded that that which symbolised the continuity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian statehood from earlier and most recent history was the town of Jajce—the town that had been the seat of the Bosnian kings and the town where, on 29 November 1943, AVNOJ passed its 'Decision on the Construction of Yugoslavia on Federative Principles', through which Bosnia-Herzegovina received all the attributes of a state.<sup>106</sup>

According to Josipović, therefore, the government made a new proposal during the course of the Constituent Assembly, which the latter adopted. The new coat of arms, on which Hasan Brkić in particular worked, was now bounded by two sheaves of deciduous and coniferous leaves respectively, in place of the sheaves of corn, which were moved to the centre of the emblem; and two factory chimneys in the very centre. The leaves, corn and chimneys together represented Bosnia-Herzegovina's economic wealth, while behind the chimneys and the corn was the shadow of the town of Jajce, representing the historical continuity of Bosnian statehood. Yet the latter element was apparent only to those who knew to look for it; it was a shadow in every sense of the word.

Josipović's account is, of course, as significant for what it leaves out as for what it includes. He passes over the substance of the disagreements over the state symbols that kept the Communists up into the early hours of the morning, and his explanations appear more like excuses. The extent of Belgrade's supervision is also unclear—whether Kardelj merely helped the Bosnian Communists reach a decision that they were too divided to reach alone or whether his suggestions were more in the shape of orders; in the space between Čolaković informing him of the dilemma and his visit from Josipović and Šakota he undoubtedly consulted Tito on the matter. Yet the account is indicative of the way the Bosnian Revolution unfolded under the combination of influences from Bosnia-Herzegovina itself and from the wider Yugoslav context; under the confluence of Bosnian autonomy and Yugoslav Communist dictates.

Josipović claims that the questions of the flag and the coat of arms were resolved simultaneously, thanks to Kardelj's intervention, yet the documents reveal that while the question of the flag was indeed resolved by the Constitutional Council's final meeting of 12 December, the question of the coat of arms remained pending until the last days of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitutional Council, in its report of 12 December, proposed the abandonment of the coat of arms with the three hands motif, in favour of the following:

The state coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a field bounded by sheaves of corn. The sheaves are bound at the bottom by a ribbon. Between the tops of the sheaves is a five-pointed star. In the centre of the field is the outline of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian mountains, and before it a torch.<sup>107</sup>

This represented a fairly nondescript coat of arms, a compromise solution. The People's Government, however, in submitting to the Constituent Assembly its proposed amendments to the Draft on 30 December, proposed something much more distinctive:

The state coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a field bound on the left side by sheaves of corn and on the right side by pine branches that are

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bound below by a ribbon. Between the tops of the sheaves and the pine branches is a red star. In the field above the ribbon is a sun that throws rays across the whole field. In the centre of the field are two factory chimneys. At the base of the chimneys is a sickle. Before the sickle is a shield on which is a hand holding a sword. In the background of the field is the outline of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian mountains.<sup>108</sup>

This version of the coat of arms included the references to Bosnian industry and forestry that were eventually included in the adopted version, but it also contained in miniature the Bosnian symbol used in the Austro-Hungarian period: a shield on which is a hand holding a sword. This proposed change to the coat of arms was typed on right at the end of the printed list of the People's Government's proposed amendments, after the list had already been printed. Although the list went numerically through the clauses that needed to be amended, the amendment for Clause 4, concerning the coat of arms, appeared at the end of the list and had been left blank so that the proposal could be added at the last minute. The People's Government had, it appears, been unable to decide upon the coat of arms at the time it printed the rest of its list.

At the eleventh hour, on New Year's Eve 1946—the last day of the Constituent Assembly—Šakota, as the People's Government's Commissioner for Questions Relating to the Draft Constitution, withdrew the proposed coat of arms involving the hand holding the sword and substituted a proposal for the coat of arms containing the two chimneys and the shadow of Jajce. It would appear that between 30 December, when the People's Government submitted its proposed amendments, and 31 December, when it changed its proposal, objections had been raised over a coat of arms containing a symbol of the Austro-Hungarian occupation. The coat of arms with the simple two-chimney motif therefore represented, apparently, a desperate effort by the People's Government to produce a solution to a problem that had been plaguing Bosnia-Herzegovina's lawmakers for months. On behalf of the People's Government, Šakota explained that the versions of the coat of arms contained in the draft and in the Constitutional Council's report were:

too general and were not characteristic for our Republic. The problem lay in the fact that the coat of arms expresses the distinctive traits of our Republic and everything that comprises the basis of our life. In the coat of arms, it was necessary to express the enormous natural wealth of the Republic; our industry; our agriculture; and our forests. The new proposal of the Government is satisfactory in this respect.

Šakota explained that the branches represented Bosnia-Herzegovina's wealth in forests. He made no mention whatsoever of the shadow of Jajce or of any historical motif on the new coat of arms.<sup>109</sup>

The timetable for promulgation of the Constitution was not derailed, but Bosnia-Herzegovina was lumbered with a truly hideous symbol of state for the next half century. Yet there was one final twist to the saga of Bosnian Communist indecision over the coat of arms. According to the constitution as it was published in the *Official Gazette of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina* at the start of 1947:

The state coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a field bounded on the left side by branches of deciduous trees, and on the right side by branches



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of coniferous trees, which are tied at the bottom with a ribbon. In the field above the ribbon are two factory chimneys, and in the foreground lie two sheaves of corn. In the background is traced the shadow of the town of Jajce.<sup>110</sup>

This still turned out to have been too hastily drafted and a month later a 'correction' to the constitution was officially published, to add a red star to the coat of arms, which was consequently now defined as follows:

The state coat of arms of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents a field bounded on the left side by branches of deciduous trees and on the right side by branches of coniferous trees, which are tied at the bottom with a ribbon. Between the tips of the branches lies a five-pointed star. In the field above the ribbon are two factory chimneys, and in the foreground lie two sheaves of corn. In the background is traced the shadow of the town of Jajce.<sup>111</sup>

Although other minor typos appeared in the first published version of the constitution and had to be subsequently corrected, no other correction was on this scale. With it, the painful saga of the selection of a coat of arms was concluded.

### *The Bosnian constitution is promulgated*

The Constituent Assembly reconvened on 28 December, when President Ugljen informed it that the Constitutional Council had submitted to the Presidency the draft constitution and its report on the draft. Over the next four days a series of speakers expressed different aspects of the People's Front's understanding of the Bosnian question. Vaso Butozan introduced the Draft by reemphasising the principles on which it had been devised:

Our Republic, like the other People's Republics, has expressed its desire to live in an equal union of nations in the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. This programme and this unity are of vital importance to the happier future of the Serbs, Muslims and Croats and other Yugoslav peoples. In such a federation, every nation is guaranteed its national development and flowering. In a federation of this kind, sovereignty and the independent exercise of government are guaranteed to every Republic, except those rights that are voluntarily transferred to the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina express, on the basis of this Constitution, their statehood and sovereignty.<sup>112</sup>

Butozan therefore expressed the fact that the NR BiH was the embodiment of the sovereignty of its peoples. As a sovereign body, the NR BiH had voluntarily transferred some of its powers to the Federation, which in turn guaranteed the sovereignty of the Republic. The Muslims, meanwhile, were de facto recognised as a 'people' or 'nation' equal to the Serbs and Croats, even if this could not be done formally.

The other side of the coin was given by Čolaković, as President of the Government, in the speech that followed Butozan's:

Without that monolithic union of nations [the FNRJ], through which they have, via the Liberation War, achieved their brotherhood, we cannot even imagine our survival, and we particularly cannot imagine achieving those enormous possibilities that the proffered draft constitution offers.<sup>113</sup>

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In this way, Čolaković counterbalanced the *de jure* sovereignty of the Republic, as expressed by Butozan, with the People's Front's *de facto* inability to imagine its life outside the Federation. Bosnia-Herzegovina's place in the Federation was required by the will of the people, not by law. Between the legal sovereignty of the Republic and the voluntary membership of the Federation, no contradiction was envisaged. In the third speech, Grgurić explained this:

By ceding one part of its sovereign rights, on the basis of the Constitution of the FNRJ, to the jurisdiction of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina has not thereby lost its sovereignty; rather, it has, on the basis of its sovereign people's will, only voluntarily transferred the execution of those sovereign rights to the state union; and this precisely in its own interests, for the purpose of a stronger protection of its national freedom and its economic and cultural development.<sup>114</sup>

Grgurić was not a Communist and his views cannot necessarily be taken as representative of Bosnian Communist opinion. Yet his selection to deliver the third speech of this crucial sitting, after Butozan and Čolaković, suggests that the Communists did not object to this interpretation of his, which unambiguously expressed the Bosnian Republic's sovereignty and its voluntary transfer of powers to the Federation.

Grgurić then proceeded to highlight the means by which Bosnian sovereignty was safeguarded within Yugoslavia. First:

Regardless of the fact that the People's Republics have transferred one part of their sovereign rights—specified in Clause 44 of the Constitution of the FNRJ—to the highest organ of state government, the People's Assembly of the FNRJ, it [i.e. the FNRJ] cannot, without changing or amending the Constitution—which means against the will of the individual People's Republics—extend its area of activities, so encroaching upon their sovereignty.

Second 'her territory, across which she exercised her state rights on a sovereign basis', and 'her state coat of arms and state republican flag' were the 'principal attributes which made Bosnia-Herzegovina a people's sovereign state; an equal member in the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia'.

So far as borders were concerned, Grgurić stated:

The territory of our People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as set forth in Clause 3 of our Draft Constitution, marks the old territorial borders, constituted at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Consequently, the borders of our Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina accord with the historical borders of our immediate homeland and correspond to the will and desires of our people in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Grgurić pointed out that although the borders between the Republics had not been definitely drawn, 'both by the Federal Constitution and by the Constitution of the individual People's Republics, it is guaranteed that the borders of the individual People's Republics cannot be changed without their consent, by which the character of their sovereignty is particularly emphasised'. However, Grgurić also stressed that:

the question of the territory of particular People's Republics was not a question of strict state borders in the sense of barricades put up between individual People's Republics, but more a question of an all-state administrative division, with the consciousness of every citi-

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zen that he is in the first place a member of a single powerful state union—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia—that alone can guarantee him freedom, survival and a better life...<sup>115</sup>

After Šefket Maglajlić had given a speech justifying the choice of the Bosnian flag, Zaim Šarac spoke to explain why popular sovereignty in Bosnia-Hercegovina should take the form of a Bosnian republic. He argued that:

Bosnia-Hercegovina has for centuries led a separate life. This life has created a particular Bosnian mentality. In Bosnia there ruled a distinctive administration, a distinctive judicial system, particular private-legal relations. Life here has created also distinctive social and cultural relations. Given all these facts, because of the intermingling of Serbs and Croats and because of Bosnia-Hercegovina's centuries of separate life, the best solution was found for the Serbs and Croats and for all the peoples of Yugoslavia, that Bosnia become the sixth unit in Yugoslavia, equal in every respect to the other five units.<sup>116</sup>

The sovereignty of Bosnia-Hercegovina was also the subject of a speech by the senior Communist Osman Karabegović, who stressed the confluence of people and republic: 'Today it is completely clear to everyone that the creation of the new Yugoslavia, as the act of the great democratic movement in all its lands, was conditional upon the will of the people, giving sovereign rights to every people, including the people of Bosnia-Hercegovina.' This sovereignty was maintained, not expended, in the formation of the Yugoslav Federation:

The purpose and essence of our form of democracy, our new state order, lie in the fact that our new Yugoslavia, as a federal state, was created on the basis of the voluntary unification of all the republics, and in the fact that unification was carried out on the basis of the free will and self-determination of the peoples, including the right to secede. That great tenet was inserted into our Federal Constitution. Its first clause maintains the sovereignty of every individual Republic, including our own.

Discussing the division of powers between the Federation and the republics, Karabegović stressed the essential safeguards of sovereignty maintained by the latter—the exclusive right to change their constitutions and borders: 'The first and most important right is precisely the right to promulgate our own Constitution', and although it had to be in accordance with the federal constitution, yet it was only the Bosnian Constituent Assembly that could promulgate or modify the Bosnian constitution; 'only to this supreme body does the right belong to alter or revise our Constitution. Not by any other means; nor can any other body alter it.' Furthermore:

The sovereignty of our Republic is manifested also in its right to give consent and permission to changes to its borders, for that question cannot be resolved without it. The right to sovereignty is also manifested in its right to bestow citizenship, grant amnesty, and in the existence of a coat of arms and flag and so forth.<sup>117</sup>

The Constituent Assembly voted on 30 December in favour of the Draft Constitution in principle, but there remained the need to vote on amendments proposed by the People's Government. On New Year's Eve, Butozan as Reporter of the Constitutional Council read out each clause in turn to the Assembly, which voted to approve them. For some of these, the People's Government proposed

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changes, which the Assembly approved. The most important of these concerned Clause 2, which defined the basis upon which the NR BiH had united with the other members of the Federation, and in the draft ran as follows:

The People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, expressing the free will of its people, has united with the equal People's Republics: The People's Republic of Serbia; the People's Republic of Croatia; the People's Republic of Slovenia; the People's Republic of Macedonia; and the People's Republic of Montenegro in a federal state—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Government argued that the clause, as it stood, did not make clear the fact that the NR BiH was the expression of the sovereignty of a multinational people comprising Serbs, Croats and Muslims. It therefore proposed that 'this distinctiveness be expressed by the words, that the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina expresses the free will of its people, regardless of nationality or religion, encompassing with this formula the Serbs and Croats, as well as the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The Government also proposed that Clause 2 should make clear that the right to self-determination also included the right 'to unite with other peoples', and express the fact that the NR BiH was established through the NOP.<sup>118</sup> Following the Assembly's adoption of the proposed amendments, Clause 2 ran as follows:

The People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, established in its liberation struggle, in the common struggle of all the peoples of Yugoslavia, as a people's state, and expressing, on the basis of the right to self-determination, including the right to secession and to unification with other peoples, through the free will of its people, regardless of nationality and religion, has united on the basis of the principle of equality with the People's Republic of Serbia, the People's Republic of Croatia, the People's Republic of Montenegro, the People's Republic of Macedonia and the People's Republic of Slovenia in a common, federal state—the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>119</sup>

The People's Government likewise proposed the amendment of Clause 10, which in the draft ran as follows: 'Contrary to the Constitution of the NR BiH is every act which on its territory is directed against the sovereignty, equality and national freedom of the people and the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the other peoples and People's Republics of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia'. In order to emphasise that this protection applied to all members of the multinational and multi-religious Bosnian people, the words 'people and People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina' were to be replaced by 'people of Bosnia-Herzegovina regardless of nationality and religion'.<sup>120</sup>

After every clause had been individually approved and, where necessary, amended, the delegates approved the name 'Constitution of the People's Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina'. The Constitution itself was then approved with 141 votes in favour, no votes against and with twelve delegates absent. At this point, the minutes record: 'All People's Delegates arise and applaud wildly and lengthily.' Finally, the Constitution was formally promulgated, at which point, according to the record: 'All People's Delegates arise from their places and lengthily applaud with wild cheers: "Long live Marshal Tito!"; "Long live the Communist Party";

“Long live the first Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina””. The Constituent Assembly then voted to transform itself into the ‘People’s Assembly of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina’, under which name it was to continue its work.<sup>121</sup>

Bosnia-Herzegovina possessed, according to the Constitution, all the attributes of a nation-state. Politically and constitutionally, the Bosnian citizenry as a whole were the ‘nation’ or ‘people’ that exercised sovereign power. According to the Constitution: ‘The People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a people’s state of republican form’ (Clause 1), in which ‘all authority stems from the people and belongs to the people’ (Clause 7). As already mentioned, the words ‘Serb’, ‘Croat’ and ‘Muslim’ do not appear in the Constitution, and the Serbs, Croats and Muslims therefore had no constitutional rights as entities in their own right, though thanks to the changes discussed above, the wording did imply a nationally heterogeneous citizenry. ‘The People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina exercises state government in a sovereign manner, transferring to the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia only those rights that are given to the Federal state by the Constitution of the FNRJ’ (Clause 10). The Assembly was the embodiment of this sovereignty:

The People’s Assembly of the NRBH is the representative of the people’s sovereignty of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Clause 53). The highest executive and administrative organ of state authority of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina is the Government of the People’s Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Clause 78).<sup>122</sup>

This was, in essence, a nation-state represented by a sovereign ‘National’ or ‘People’s’ assembly, in the tradition established by the French Revolution, a tradition to which new nation-states in Europe had tended to subscribe. The Government was responsible to the People’s Assembly. There was, however, a tension between the ‘political nation’ or ‘people’ of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the five ‘nations’ recognised by the FNRJ Constitution—the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins. This tension was never resolved during the lifetime of the Yugoslav state and was formally the issue over which the war of 1992–95 broke out.

## BOSNIA AND THE MUSLIMS AFTER LIBERATION

c. APRIL 1945–SEPTEMBER 1950

*Others do us the honour of letting us march under their banners, since we have none of our own.*

From *Death and the Dervish* by Meša Selimović (1966)<sup>1</sup>

The NOP triumphed in Bosnia because it expanded beyond its loyal, Communist-dominated Partisan base to become a heterogeneous mass movement reflective of all sections of the Bosnian population that were opposed to the Ustasha and Nazi order. This meant, first, that the NOP encompassed part of the Muslim autonomist resistance, as well as the resistance of dissident Croat elements, and second that it took in sections of the Serb population that remained pro-Chetnik until the end of the war and beyond. This strategy was very successful. Yet the spectacular nature of the Partisan military victory concealed the shaky foundations of the new Bosnian order, whose governments at the republican and lower levels were like so many fortresses in a largely hostile territory whose population had been conquered as much as liberated. With the common Axis and fascist enemy defeated, the bond linking the Communists with their collaborators among the non-Communist supporters of the NOP was removed and the political struggle began among the former partners for the determining of the post-war order. The weakness of the Communists' regime, the extent of popular hostility to it, the perceived danger of the vocal and organised opposition and the flimsiness of the new state's organs all pushed the Communists to consolidate their dictatorship, something that involved radical social and economic reforms. This in turn catalysed the conflict between the Communists and their conservative opponents, particularly from the ranks of the Catholic Church and Muslim autonomists, among whom the Young Muslims increasingly stood out. Given the Serb numerical preponderance at all levels of the Communist and Partisan structures, the tightening of the regime's control in the face of organised Catholic and Muslim

autonomist opposition inevitably began to resemble Serb oppression of non-Serbs, with the Muslims denied national and to some extent religious rights and the Croats widely treated as second class citizens. The emancipatory and the repressive, the progressive and the reactionary were inextricably entwined.

## *The Communists besieged from below*

Following their military victory the Communists in Bosnia were faced with the problem of how to govern an entire country where they enjoyed only limited popular support and faced the active hostility of wide sections of the population, including the resistance of armed anti-Communist bands. The Bosnian population was predominantly illiterate and much of it was imbued with chauvinistic hostility toward other Bosnians. The Communists depended for their rule on newly established organs of government that were often inefficient and corrupt, if not actually in the hands of hostile elements. In these circumstances, the new regime was weak and insecure; its struggle merely to survive took precedence over enlightened considerations.

For all the talk of Bosnia as a common homeland of Serbs, Muslims and Croats, the 'liberated' population was bitterly divided by its experiences of the occupation and the Ustasha and Chetnik genocides. The District Commission of the KPJ for Zvornik reported on 26 April 1945: 'Both the Serb and the Muslim masses are unenlightened, politically unaware and filled with chauvinistic hatred. The reaction has, through various lies, intrigues and insinuations, attempted to make use of this situation to prevent the fraternisation of Serbs and Muslims.'<sup>2</sup> The District NOO for Stolac reported on 10 May 1945 that although the local Croat population was beginning to join the movement, the Muslims remained aloof thanks to the influence of the Muslim 'reaction', and while the Serbs were in the majority supportive, they were at the same time vengefully inclined towards the non-Serbs.<sup>3</sup> The Okrug People's Council for Sarajevo reported on 7 August that 'the phenomenon of brotherhood and unity has not been achieved in its entirety, particularly in the districts of East Bosnia where relations between Muslims and Serbs are fairly strained'.<sup>4</sup> The same council reported on 5 November that the population was voting in the election entirely on sectarian lines, with Muslims voting for Muslim candidates, Serbs for Serb candidates and Croats for Croat candidates. The Rogatica, Fojnica and Vareš districts were particular hotbeds of reaction, with the Catholic clergy in the latter two being entirely hostile to the regime. Numbers of teachers in the *okrug* were inadequate.<sup>5</sup>

Across Bosnia, a particular problem was posed by the need to reintegrate refugees who either faced the hostility of local people among whom they sought to return or brought with them their own prejudices. Serb refugees returning from Serbia had not been touched by the Bosnian NOP and often brought with them anti-Communist, anti-Muslim and anti-Croat sentiments.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the Cazin district of the Bihać *okrug*, Serbs returning from wartime imprisonment in Germany were reported in mid 1945 to be hostile to the Muslims and view them as holding all power in the region's government, while in the neighbouring district of Bosanska Krupa, 'Chetnik' elements were reported to be agitating against the return of Muslim refugees.<sup>7</sup> The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo



reported on 5 June 1945 that the Serb population of Višegrad had participated in the expulsion of the Muslim population and feared its return; in this context, local Serb reactionaries were accusing the regime of waging a pro-Muslim policy and were agitating for annexation of the area to Serbia. In the Sarajevo district, pro-Chetnik elements burned Muslim homes to deter refugee returns; while in the Foča district, the population was alienated by the regime's execution of Chetniks and believed that it was treating the local Ustashes much more leniently. Indeed former Ustashes were reported to be coming out of hiding and going openly among the people; some were even covertly collaborating with other opponents of the regime.<sup>8</sup> According to the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo in November 1945, armed resistance to the regime in the vicinities of Vareš, Kakanj and Fojnica was restricted to Serbs and Croats; Ustasha and Chetnik groups collaborated on an anti-Muslim basis, allegedly in defence of the Cross and because the Muslims were holding power.<sup>9</sup> By January 1946 Muslim refugees were still unable to return to their homes in Čajniče in East Bosnia; those attempting to do so were instantly killed by local Serbs.<sup>10</sup> Inter-ethnic relations tended gradually to improve as the months went by. Nevertheless, as late as 3 May 1946 the District Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo reported to the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo on the success of the regime's enemies in ruining good inter-ethnic relations: 'They act on the basis of religion, and go in the direction of deepening the hatred between Serbs, Croats and Muslims. In this their endeavour, the enemies are succeeding. Bickering and squabbling among Serbs, Croats and Muslims are relatively great across almost the whole district.'<sup>11</sup>

The expansion of Partisan-controlled territory to include the whole of Bosnia necessarily meant that organs of the 'people's government' had to be established in areas where support for the NOP had been weak, as well as in those where they had been strong. The Okrug People's Council for Travnik reported on 1 July 1945 that a number of treasonous individuals had become People's Councillors in the Jajce district and then found guilty by a military court and sentenced to death; the case, according to the report, 'needs to be for us a signal for alarm in the struggle for the cleansing and consolidation of the people's government'.<sup>12</sup> The Okrug People's Council for Bihać reported on 2 August 1945 that in some of the village and municipal councils in some parts of its territory there were 'open opponents of the NOP, so that on this terrain the organs of People's Defence arrested several members of the people's government, against whom an investigation is under way'.<sup>13</sup> The Okrug People's Council for Banja Luka reported on 7 August 1945 that in the districts of Bosanska Krajina proper, which had formed the bastion of the Partisan movement (Bosanski Novi, Bosanska Dubica, Prijedor, Sanski Most, Ključ and Bosanska Gradiška), the population was strongly supportive of the regime. But in the Central Bosnian districts, which were only fully liberated with the final German withdrawal in the spring of 1945 (Banja Luka, Prnjavor, Kotor Varoš, Tešanj, Teslić and Derventa), the best part of the population was only subsumed within NOP activity following liberation and continued to harbour considerable pro-Chetnik and pro-Ustasha sentiments, manifested partly in the support given by part of this population to the Chetnik and Ustasha bands still operating in the region. This was particularly the case with the Croat population, while among the Serbs, reactionary influences were imported by the return of

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refugees, particularly Orthodox priests, who had taken refuge in Nedić's Serbia during the war. Difficult economic conditions and the regime's slowness in bringing about improvement increased popular apathy and resentment while the People's Councils, particularly in the countryside, were frequently passive, ineffective and unrepresentative of the population.<sup>14</sup>

Far from seeing themselves as representatives of their constituents, People's Councillors tended to view their posts as personal property and their offices as a private domain. As Vojo Ljujić, secretary of the executive council of the Sarajevo city assembly, complained at the Sarajevo city assembly session of 17 February 1946:

Our People's Councils, in their furnishing, cleanliness and hygiene, do not suffice as People's Councils and do not look like People's Councils. The outer appearance of the neighbourhood councils similarly do not suffice, for on entering the councils one sees filth and rubbish. The inner order in the councils is likewise not as it should be. When someone joins a people's council, as it is now, he does not feel that it is a people's council, but that it is his own house.

Furthermore:

Our comrade commissioners and council members are not linked to the masses and do not go to conferences. The people do not know them. They do not go among the people that they might acquaint themselves with the needs and problems of the people on the terrain, and it is a fact that the people do not know them even in their own neighbourhoods, because they have not succeeded in going among the people.<sup>15</sup>

The problems posed by state-building on politically hostile terrain compounded the problem of the general backwardness of the population, with illiteracy, corruption, self-will on the part of People's Councillors often going hand in hand with political hostility to the new regime, and even a readiness to collaborate with anti-Communist armed bands. The Okrug People's Council for Doboj reported on 4 November that its bureaucracy was disorganised and its officials poor in quality; the newly established *okrug* had allegedly been sent only the lowest quality officials by its selfish older neighbours, the Banja Luka and Tuzla *okrugs*. The People's Militia was also poor in quality, owing to the fact that the greatest part of the *okrug* had been liberated only belatedly and the authorities had few reliable collaborators among the population upon whom to rely. Meanwhile, public security remained under threat from Ustasha and Chetnik armed bands. The number of schools and level of public education were wholly inadequate, while some of the teachers available were considered politically suspect.<sup>16</sup> According to the Secretariat of the Okrug People's Council for Tuzla's report of 8 November 1945: 'The organisational situation of the organs of people's government, in the local as in most of the Okrug councils, is unsatisfactory', something that it blamed on the 'abuse of the broadening of our democracy', which had resulted in 'the entry into the councils of those people, too, who on the basis of their moral qualifications would not be able to be functionaries of the People's Councils' and who were guilty of 'speculation, opportunism and, in the final resort, enmity towards our state through their work', something that was manifest in corruption and in collaboration with enemy guerrilla bands. Two local council

secretaries in the Lukavac district were arrested for harbouring such bands. The Secretariat announced its intention to solve the problem of inefficiency, corruption, primitivism, self-will and political disloyalty on the part of its subordinate councils by increasing the control and supervision of higher councils over lower councils.<sup>17</sup>

This pattern of reports on the uneven quality of local and regional government and of uneven popular support for the regime was seen across the country in this period.<sup>18</sup> The problems of the low quality of organs of local and regional councils, their inefficiency and political unreliability, dovetailed with the problems created by poor inter-ethnic relations. In these circumstances, the question of the ethnicity of local and regional government officials was somewhat delicate. The regime naturally attempted to create a multi-ethnic administration but this was not always straightforward, given the widely differing degrees of support it enjoyed among different nationalities in different areas. On 15 May 1945 when the presidency of the Bosnian People's Parliament debated the appointment of a People's Council for the Sarajevo Okrug, Hamdija Čemerlić complained that the proposed *okrug* president was a Serb, objecting on the grounds that not a single *okrug* president so far appointed was a Muslim. But Avdo Humo responded that both the president and secretary of the City People's Council of Sarajevo as well as the candidate for the president of the Sarajevo Okrug People's Liberation Front were all Muslims, while the strength of the 'reaction' among the Serb population of the Sarajevo *okrug* was such that a Serb president of the *okrug* was required.<sup>19</sup> Given the explosive character of local and regional inter-ethnic relations, building organs of local and regional government was a matter of treading on eggshells.

The Partisan war against the Chetniks, Ustashes and Muslim autonomists continued in all its ferocity in the months and years after the Partisan seizure of power across Bosnia, but now it was a war waged by a Partisan regime against hostile sections of its own population, whose resistance was manifest in the guerrilla struggle waged by the residual Chetnik, Ustasha and Muslim autonomist bands. The local People's Councils were frequently caught between the regime and the bands and frequently collaborated with the latter, while the population was caught between fear of the bands and fear of arrest.<sup>20</sup> Yet the very organs of security upon which the regime depended to deal with the bands were unreliable. As the District Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo reported on 28 November 1945:

The militia, as an organ of public security, cannot in any circumstances suffice, for it is mostly composed of people who were in the most part in the Chetniks, Home Guard and various militias, so it is not at all strange that it today engages in a conciliatory policy towards the Chetniks; so far as the leadership of the militia is concerned, it likewise cannot satisfy the tasks set before it, while its commander himself is prone to drink.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, as the Ozren municipal KPJ organisation reported on 11 August 1945, the army was stretched to the limits of its capacity fighting the bands and there were simply no military units available to provide security for the Communists and state officials.<sup>22</sup>

Paradoxically, the regime to a large extent viewed the older bureaucratic structures inherited from earlier regimes as more secure instruments of its rule than many of the People's Councils that its revolution had thrown up. Initially, all state

officials present on Bosnian territory at the hour of liberation were placed at the disposal of the state. This included those who were ultimately to be assigned to service in the Yugoslav Federal bureaucracy, rather than the Bosnian bureaucracy; in the short-term, it was the federal unit that assumed authority while the Federation was still in the process of construction and the precise division of individual state officials between the two bureaucracies had not yet been decided.<sup>23</sup> On 26 May 1945 the Bosnian government ordered the Okrug People's Councils systematically to make use of trained bureaucrats and other experts: 'A particular course needs to be led with regard to skilled individuals (doctors, engineers, etc.), without whose active help we would build our country with much more difficulty. Therefore our criteria towards these people, insofar as they have erred over the P[eople's] L[iberation] S[truggle], must be milder.' This required a full inventory of each *okrug's* skilled human resources: 'Therefore, immediately upon receiving this letter, send us a list: particularly of skilled individuals (agronomists, doctors, etc.) and particularly of other official individuals, employed as a clerical force in the People's Councils of all levels and in their enterprises and institutions.'<sup>24</sup>

The regime consequently co-opted most of the bureaucrats who had served earlier regimes. In the words of the Sarajevo city assembly's resolution of 29 September 1945: 'The young and inexperienced people's government, in the absence of cadres, adopted almost the entire old bureaucratic apparatus, and the resolution of the burning questions, for which are sought total self-denial and determination, was thereby made more difficult.'<sup>25</sup> Of 769 city officials that the new City Council inherited from the NDH (excluding education officials), only twenty were sacked: seventeen for having been pro-Ustasha or anti-NOP and three for professional incompetence. Of the twenty sacked officials, fourteen had served under the Yugoslav kingdom and one under Austria-Hungary. Eight officials were also pensioned off; all of these had served under the Yugoslav kingdom and five of them under Austria-Hungary.<sup>26</sup> On the assumption that the sample of twenty-eight was representative of the 769 as a whole, and in turn of the officials in other parts of the country, then there was very considerable continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary state apparatuses. At the same time, the Bosnian government took steps to create a uniform, professional bureaucracy, and issued a directive on 10 July requiring forty-five secretaries of upper- and middle-level People's Councils to attend a training course.<sup>27</sup> On 16 March 1946 the Bosnian government issued a directive requiring all clerical staff in the People's Councils to undertake a training course.<sup>28</sup>

Such was the perceived degree of bureaucratic continuity between the new regime and its Ustasha predecessor that it aroused ire in some circles. Sava Kosanović, Minister of Information in the Federal government and a Serb politician of the Independent Democratic Party, wrote to the Yugoslav Minister of the Interior on 21 May 1945 to complain at what he claimed was the domination by Muslims of the administrative and governmental organs in Bosanska Krajina:

Here is an example: in the whole of Bosanska Krajina in the forestry service there is only one Serb forestry engineer, and that is Ostoja Mejić, the husband of Rodoljub Čolaković's niece; however, the chief of the forestry department for Bosanska Krajina is the Ustasha commissioner before whom Ostoja Mejić had in 1941 to take a bureaucratic oath to

## BOSNIA AND THE MUSLIMS AFTER LIBERATION

Pavelić. To illustrate this better and to emphasise it: in the City NOO in Banja Luka not a single Serb is represented as a councillor, even though the Serb population represents one quarter of the population of Banja Luka.

Kosanović contrasted the lenient treatment accorded to Muslim bureaucrats who had compromised themselves serving the NDH with the distrust shown by the regime to Serb refugees who had been persecuted by the Ustasas and were now returning to Bosnia from Serbia. 'The consequences of this are the discontent of the Serbs, who have survived the Ustasha regime and its desire that they emigrate to Serbia', wrote Kosanović; 'The reaction is taking advantage of the errors of the representatives of the people's government in their political purpose, and is assuming among the Serb population of Bosnia-Herzegovina an ever greater sweep.'<sup>29</sup>

The Communists thought the problem of a politically unreliable and administratively inefficient system of 'people's government' was caused by too much democracy compared with professionalism and devotion to the cause of the NOP. As one Communist argued at the Sarajevo KPJ district committee meeting of 17 January 1946:

When the local and village councils of the P[eople's] F[ront] were created, there was no evaluation of the people involved, rather, only those who were popular among the people entered the councils, on account of the weakness and small number of members of the Party. Here, we must carry out a complete reorganisation of the councils and only in that way rectify the situation.<sup>30</sup>

This situation created a sense among the Communists in this period that, in the words of a member of the Sarajevo district committee on 27 June 1946, 'the main task which stands before our Party organisation in the course of the following month, is that there be carried out a purge of the people's government; of the local People's Councils as of the district council'.<sup>31</sup>

The full establishment of the new state following liberation forced the new government to judge the large body of individuals who had collaborated with the Ustasha regime but who were not necessarily war criminals. The legal system offered a modicum of protection for the accused; thus, for example, in July 1945 the Court of People's Honour in Sarajevo overturned the conviction of Bećir Đonlagić, who had been imprisoned for having served in the NDH parliament. The Court accepted evidence that Đonlagić had broken with the Ustasas in the summer of 1942 over the persecution of the Serbs and had subsequently cooperated with the NOP.<sup>32</sup> Inevitably, however, many innocent individuals were persecuted while some guilty ones went free or even became servants of the new order. Danilo Nadaždin, a Herzegovinian Partisan, recalls coming across a man in Partisan uniform in Sarajevo in August or September 1945 whom he recognised as an Ustasha who had personally threatened him with a rifle in the summer of 1941.<sup>33</sup>

The transition towards an increasingly authoritarian regime and ultimately an outright one-party dictatorship reflected not simply an innate Communist inclination to monopolise power, but also a genuine insecurity on the part of the regime, given the weak foundations of its rule. The construction of the Bosnian state required that localist self-will on the part of People's Councils be subordinated to a uniform, all-Bosnian model. The Bosnia-wide opposition to the new

regime—both the violent resistance of the enemy bands and the quieter obstruction of hostile or self-willed local elements—catalysed the Communist regime's radicalisation and transition towards a more sectarian policy inspired by the ideals of class war, proletarian power and socialism. This in turn catalysed the establishment of full-blown dictatorship. This was not a matter simply of suppressing dissent and stifling pluralism; it involved a brutal war against whole sections of the Bosnian population. At the party leadership's meeting of 5 August 1946, Uglješa Danilović highlighted the threat posed by the rebel bands. He claimed that there had been seventy murders carried out by these bands in Bosnia in May 1946 alone; that there were 1,400 armed enemy guerrillas on Bosnian territory; that these guerrillas were present in all but a few Bosnian districts. In Danilović's words: 'The outlaws are without doubt the shock force of the reaction in B[osnia]-H[erzegovina].' In response, Danilović admitted, 'We took severe measures that were virtually illegal; we resettled their families without court or trial, to completely different regions.'<sup>34</sup>

### *The Republic and the army*

Bosnia-Herzegovina had been liberated by the combined forces of the Partisan regular army and the underground NOP. Yet this 'liberation', in practice, involved the conquest of wide sections of the Bosnian population that were hostile to the Partisans. The border between 'liberation' and 'conquest' was a blurred one, and this tension became more acute following the final liberation of Yugoslavia, as the new Yugoslav Army became increasingly divested of its direct organic links with the local population and increasingly centralised under the command of Belgrade. On 1 August 1945 the Yugoslav Army ordered the internment in POW camps of all officers, NCOs and military officials from quisling formations—including the Home Guard, Ustashas, militias and Chetniks—who had remained in these formations after 15 January.<sup>35</sup> This was a sign that the symbiotic relationship between the Partisans and broad elements among the quisling and collaborationist forces had ended and a new, less tolerant era had begun. At the same time, the Bosnian state began to take on a more cohesive, permanent form at all levels, including in areas that had been lukewarm or hostile toward the NOP, and started to assert its authority. As the Yugoslav Army and Bosnian state hardened, they clashed with one another as well.

The Country Administration of People's Wealth of Bosnia-Herzegovina sent a complaint on 3 October to the Staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army alleging that military officers were stealing items of furniture that had been loaned to them by the Bosnian authorities during their stay in Bosnia and leaving the country with them. The Country Administration reminded the 6<sup>th</sup> Army that 'it is known that the federal unit Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the poorest federal units, and the transfer of furniture to other federal units is damaging to this unit, which is anyway much poorer in this respect. Certainly, other federal units are much better off than our unit.'<sup>36</sup> The Okrug People's Council reported on 5 December 1945 that 'in some areas there is an incorrect relationship between the army and the people. Certain of our units carry out night-time searches, confiscating everything that falls into their hands. We can list many examples of the terrorising of people, persecution,

beatings for various unexplained reasons.<sup>37</sup> Such alleged abuses may sometimes have involved an inter-ethnic dimension; thus, in late May 1945 the Kupres District People's Council complained that Partisans of the 12<sup>th</sup> Hercegovinian Brigade had carried out unauthorised requisitioning in the villages of Zvirnjača and Ravno and threatened local councillors at gunpoint, while the brigade's staff claimed that the villages had been harbouring Ustasha bands and that the requisitioning of food to feed the hungry soldiers had been both necessary and legitimate.<sup>38</sup>

Complaints came also from the army's side. The Staff of the Yugoslav 6<sup>th</sup> Army wrote to the Bosnian government on 9 July 1946 claiming that one secretary of the People's Council of a Sarajevo ward had threatened some officers that 'the People's Government can disband the Army as well if it wants'; that the secretary of the Banja Luka People's Council had made the chief of the military department for Banja Luka wait two hours outside his office without seeing him; that a secretary of a Local People's Council in Banja Luka had, in the middle of the street, torn up an official decree sent to him by the district military authorities; and that the District People's Council of Mrkonjić Grad had withheld local documents from the town's military office for a full seven days, despite an urgent request from the latter that they be sent. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army received satisfaction; the offending secretary of the Sarajevo People's Council ward, Ahmet Dedović, was forced to resign his post, while the Bosnian government ordered the Banja Luka Okrug People's Council to take action in respect of the abuses reported in Banja Luka and Mrkonjić Grad.<sup>39</sup>

Such incidents of conflict or dearth of cooperation between the People's Councils and the territorial military authorities occurred throughout Bosnia-Hercegovina, in particular in the Travnik and Mostar *okrugs*. The army appears generally to have prevailed in disputes with the civilian authorities, even with the Bosnian government itself. On one occasion in December 1945 the Bosnian prime minister's office wrote to the Okrug People's Council for Tuzla, ordering it to restore to the Sisters of Mercy in Brčko a nunnery that the army had confiscated to use as a military hospital. The prime minister's office requested that, at the very least, the nuns should be returned the use of at least one part of their nunnery, and claimed that, according to its sources, the building was not actually needed for the military hospital. But the army, in the form of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, simply refused to return even part of the convent to the nuns.<sup>40</sup> The Bosnian government was not able to challenge the army. On 12 August 1946 it sent a directive to the Okrug People's Councils, alerting them to the need to cooperate with the military authorities in Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>41</sup> In the years immediately after World War II the republics were rapidly subordinated to the Yugoslav Federal centre as a centralised Communist dictatorship emerged.

### *The colonisation of Vojvodina*

Propaganda was not the only method by which the Communists sought to reconcile the Serb population. Ordinary people in Bosnia at the war's end were ultimately more concerned with questions of economic survival than with national or ideological matters, and wealth and land were redistributed in favour of Partisan families as a means of securing the continued loyalty of the Partisan



base. Bosnian land was to go to Bosnian colonists; regarding the colonisation of land in Bosnia vacated by Italians and Germans, the Yugoslav Ministry of Colonisation wrote to the Bosnian government on 24 May 1945: 'We are anyway of the opinion, that this land should be distributed to colonists who are Partisans or members of their families, and only to those who are from the territory of your federal unit.' Consequently, 'we request that you take the necessary measures via your territorial organs so as to ensure that the abandoned land, along with the houses and inventories that belong to it, be genuinely safeguarded for the needs of colonisation by Partisan colonists from the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina'.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the Bosnian government took steps to restrict spontaneous emigration from Bosnia to other federal units on account of the economic cost this represented for Bosnia.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, the most drastic measure taken in this sphere was the settling of Partisan families in Vojvodina on land confiscated from the German minority that had been killed or expelled. This began with a spontaneous movement on the part of some Bosnian families to migrate to Vojvodina, which the Bosnian government took steps to prevent.<sup>44</sup> But the authorities then undertook to direct the colonisation of Vojvodina themselves. The largest number of the Yugoslav families so rewarded—9,000, as *Sarajevski Dnevnik* loudly reported on 29 August 1945—were to come from Bosnia.<sup>45</sup> The available land in Vojvodina was to be divided between Yugoslavs on the basis of a republican, not a national assessment. Yet it was above all the Serbs, rather than the Muslims or Croats, who were willing to migrate to Vojvodina. The Yugoslav Ministry of Colonisation complained in the autumn of 1945 that rumours were circulated among the Muslims that they would be isolated from one another in Vojvodina and not allowed to settle in groups. On 8 November the Ministry requested the Bosnian Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to reassure potential Muslim colonists that they would be allowed to settle in Muslim villages in Vojvodina, rather than be dispersed among non-Muslims.<sup>46</sup>

Yet despite all the efforts of the authorities to encourage the Muslims to participate in the colonisation schemes, neither the Muslims nor the Bosnian Croats were very willing to do so. By the spring of 1947 only 138 out of an expected 320 Muslim families had settled in the projected Muslim colony at Bačko Novo Selo. Conversely, priority was given to those families who had supported the Partisans in the earlier years of the war, 1941–43, and in Bosnia these were predominantly Serbs. Indeed, while Bosnian Muslims and Croats were reluctant to relocate to Vojvodina, Bosnian Serbs were, in the eyes of the regime, too eager. On 3–4 September 1945, the quota for Bosnian families to be settled in Vojvodina was raised to 12,000. At the start of 1946, however, the Yugoslav Minister of Colonisation Sreten Vukosavljević wrote to the Bosnian government alerting it to the fact that too many people had left Bosnia for Vojvodina, about 10,000 families: 'Emigration beyond what is essentially needed only damages both the economic and the political interests of the Bosnian federal unit as of the state as a whole.' Vukosavljević argued that circumstances had changed since the Bosnian quota for Vojvodina had been raised, and that in the meantime land belonging to 'Polish colonists' in Bosnia had become available to the Bosnian government. He suggested that the remaining Bosnians due to be settled in Vojvodina, according to the quota, should be settled on the former Polish lands instead.<sup>47</sup>

In total, 13,096 families, amounting to 78,576 people or 3.29 per cent of Bosnia's population, settled in Vojvodina in the period 1945–48; 98 per cent of these were Serbs.<sup>48</sup> This was, indeed, the beginning of the massive post-war migration of Bosnian Serbs to Serbia, which the Communist industrial revolution would greatly accelerate. Though it reduced social discontent in the short-term, in the long-term it would lead to the Serbs—still the largest Bosnian nationality in 1945—being outnumbered by the Muslims, something to which the higher Muslim birth rate also contributed. In the long run it would accentuate Serb insecurity.

### *The Polish and Ukrainian minorities*

Vukosavljević's mention of how land formerly belonging to 'Polish colonists' from Bosnia had come into the hands of the Bosnian government was an allusion to the disappearance in the months following liberation of one of Bosnia's largest ethnic minorities, in circumstances that did not reflect entirely favourably on the new order. The fate of the Bosnian Poles indicates that not all of Bosnia's inhabitants would find a home in the Bosnian republic.

Wartime Bosnia had significant populations of ethnic Poles and Ukrainians, numbering approximately 16–18,000 and 7–8,000 respectively. Although numerically insignificant in most parts of the country, they held significance in the eyes of the Communists because they formed a link with the Slavic inhabitants of other countries, one of which was the Soviet Union. The former secretary of the KPJ in the 1930s, Milan Gorkić, was himself a Bosnian Ukrainian. From the early months of the uprising, Partisan propaganda appealed to these minorities on a pan-Slavic basis. One Partisan pamphlet of November 1941, whose exact author is unknown, appealed to the 'Brother Ukrainians, Ruthenes and Poles!', warning them that 'German fascism is preparing to exterminate all Slavs; to destroy the worker-peasant peoples: Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Russians'; it therefore urged them to join the NOP if they wished to 'defend the interests of all Slavic nations' and 'ensure that Bosnia remains your second homeland and that you live in peace with your brother Serbs, Croats and Muslims'.<sup>49</sup>

At the First Session of ZAVNOBiH, several speakers referred to the 'invincible Red Army' and 'brotherly Soviet Russia', and to the view of 'the Germans and Italians [as] the greatest enemies of the Slavs', giving the ideology of the congress a definite pan-Slavic tinge. Speaking of the participation of their respective minorities in the NOP, the ethnic Pole Ignac Kunecki stated that 'the Poles know that their enemy is whoever marches with the Germans', while the ethnic Ukrainian Vasilj Semak spoke of the need 'to avenge those crimes that the Germans have committed against the great Ukrainian nation'. The session ended with the singing of the pan-Slav hymn 'Hej Slaveni'.<sup>50</sup> This was an aspect of Stalin's policy of encouraging pan-Slavic nationalist sentiment as part of the Soviet Union's 'Great Patriotic' struggle.

Relatively large Polish and Ukrainian communities were concentrated in the Prnjavor district. Neither group was initially very willing to join the NOP, although the Poles were more friendly while the Ukrainians were hostile, with some even volunteering to fight for the Germans on the eastern front.<sup>51</sup> This may

have been a reflection of the different ways Poles and Ukrainians viewed German policy in Eastern Europe, or possibly of different treatment by the Germans in Bosnia. Nevertheless, the two minorities tended to close ranks. The Ukrainians themselves accepted Polish leadership and it was via the local Polish communal bodies that the Communists attempted to induce them to join the Partisans.<sup>52</sup> Poles and Ukrainians did not join readily, but the importance attached to them is suggested by the fact that the Okrug Committee for Prnjavor considered it a success when by the end of 1943 about twenty local Poles and Ukrainians had been mobilised.<sup>53</sup>

The Polish minority was largely unwilling to join the NOP until the spring of 1944, but then began to participate under the influence of a representative in Yugoslavia of the Polish government-in-exile. The Partisans eventually tried to bypass this representative by establishing an 'Initiative Council of Poles' as a front organisation to mobilise the Bosnian Poles. Thanks to the efforts of this body and of the Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Prnjavor, and relying on the collaboration of the traditional Polish village headmen, the Partisans succeeded on 7 May 1944 in establishing a 'Polish Battalion' as the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 14<sup>th</sup> Central Bosnian Brigade of the 11<sup>th</sup> Krajina Division.<sup>54</sup> Although this unit numbered a modest 200 ethnic-Polish soldiers, it appears to have helped in the mobilisation of other Poles into the NOP. The Presidency of ZAVNOBiH sought to encourage this when it resolved, in its session of 24–25 April 1944: 'The Polish, Ukrainian and Czech national minorities will be granted full freedom of use of their mother tongues.'<sup>55</sup>

At the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH Ignac Kunecki spoke once again in the name of the Bosnian Poles, citing Poland's partition in 1795 and the Polish nation's long history of oppression and struggle for freedom, while Vasilj Semak spoke in the name of the Bosnian Ukrainians, citing the struggle of the Soviet Ukrainians in the Red Army. Yet on this occasion disagreement broke out among the delegates over the question of the minorities. Kunecki noted that ZAVNOBiH's Declaration of the Rights of the Citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina did not explicitly guarantee the equality of members of the minorities, even though the equivalent declaration of AVNOJ did so. Consequently, in Kunecki's words: 'We should like our Declaration of the Rights of the Citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina also to be amended, so that it emphasises the equality of the national minorities in Bosnia-Hercegovina. This is not my personal wish. This is, rather, so that we can more easily operate among the minorities'. Yet Čolaković argued against Kunecki's somewhat innocuous request, on the grounds that the Declaration 'interests not only the public of Bosnia-Hercegovina, but the rest of the public, and if you will, the world public. It would appear, on that basis, that in Bosnia-Hercegovina there exist some sort of minorities to whom it is necessary to guarantee that right in the special Constitution of Bosnia-Hercegovina, beside the Constitution of Federative Yugoslavia'. Yet unlike in Croatia or in Vojvodina, for example, 'The minorities in Bosnia-Hercegovina are, on the basis of their numbers, insignificant minorities'. Čolaković therefore requested that Kunecki withdraw his request, which the latter did, and the Declaration was passed with the usual Communist unanimity.<sup>56</sup>

Representatives of the Polish minority appear to have remained unsatisfied with the rights accorded their community. On 26 January 1945 Kunecki and two other

Poles visited the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH to discuss certain questions regarding Polish minority rights. The Polish delegation sought assurances regarding language and cultural rights, the renewal of cultural and educational activity on behalf of the Polish minority and the right of the Polish Council to be consulted and its voice heard in any court case involving the prosecution of ethnic Poles. The Presidency responded by giving assurances regarding the first two requests, but rejected the right of any outside body to interfere with judicial independence.<sup>57</sup> Whereas Kunecki's Ukrainian counterpart Semak spoke at the Third Session of ZAVNO-BiH, Kunecki did not—presumably, his independent actions had caused the Communists to exile him to the back row.

In these circumstances, a conference of Bosnian Poles held on 1 July 1945 resolved that the minority should seek repatriation to Poland. An ethnic Polish delegation therefore visited Bosnia's Prime Minister Čolaković and obtained from him a promise to assist such a repatriation. After Čolaković received Tito's consent, ethnic Polish delegates visited Poland to arrange the project with the Polish government. It was only with some reluctance that they obtained a promise from the Yugoslav government of compensation for the land and homes they would leave behind, after the ethnic Polish representatives wrote to Tito to remind him, among other things, of the ethnic Poles' contribution to the NOP and of the terror to which they were still being subjected by Chetnik elements in the Prnjavor region. Indeed the Department for Internal Affairs of the Banja Luka Okrug People's Council confirmed at this time that 'local Serbs, who were persecuted during the war, did not view these minorities [the Poles and Ukrainians] with sympathy'; consequently, Chetnik elements were waging a campaign of terror, 'with the support of a large part of the Serb population, to hasten the decision of the Poles and Ukrainians to emigrate'. Thousands of ethnic Poles and Ukrainians were driven from their homes by this terror campaign at the end of 1945 and the start of 1946. Following a visit by the Polish Ambassador to Prnjavor on 25 December a Polish militia was set up under the umbrella of the Yugoslav authorities to defend the Polish population. Kunecki nevertheless complained at this time that 'there are cases of incorrect behaviour towards the Poles on the part of the people's militia. The Poles have been unable alone to defend themselves from the Chetnik bands in their villages, for the army simply passed through the area, and did not remain long.'<sup>58</sup>

On 2 January 1946 the governments of Yugoslavia and Poland signed a protocol that provided for the 'voluntary' emigration of members of Yugoslavia's Polish minority to Poland, involving their loss of Yugoslav citizenship and all their immovable property in Yugoslavia, in return for compensation.<sup>59</sup> It was only six days later, on 8 January, that Vukosavljević wrote his letter to the Bosnian government, informing it that the 'Bosnian federal unit has obtained from the land of Polish colonists, for its stock of land, a large number of available plots and a large number of houses. It appears that it will obtain more.' So much more, in fact, that Bosnia's quota of Vojvodinian land for settlement could, as mentioned above, be legitimately reduced.<sup>60</sup> The repatriation to Poland of most of the Bosnian Polish population, numbering just over 14,000 individuals, was carried out between 28 March and 2 November 1946. According to the census of 1953 there were by then only 1,161 ethnic Poles left in Bosnia, a number that fell to 609 by 1981. Possibly

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owing to the break with the Soviet Union, the Ukrainians in Yugoslavia were re-categorised as 'Ruthenes', of whom there were 7,473 in Bosnia in 1953 and 6,136 in 1961. However, in subsequent censuses the Ukrainian category was restored; in 1981 there were 4,502 Ukrainians and 111 Ruthenes in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>61</sup>

In these circumstances, the failure of ZAVNOBiH's Declaration of the Rights of the Citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina to explicitly guarantee the equality of Bosnia's national minorities and Čolaković's rejection, at ZAVNOBiH's Second Session, of Kunecki's request that it be amended to do so, assume a somewhat sinister light.

### *The Communists and Christianity*

The question of how to tackle organised religion was one of the most difficult the Communists faced after the war. They were torn between the desire to appease an often hostile population through friendly treatment of the churches, on the one hand, and on the other the fear that these ideologically unsympathetic and politically dangerous institutions aroused. As the regime launched what would be a highly radical and effective long-term process of secularisation of Bosnian society, the impulse towards co-optation of the churches vied with the impulse towards repression. Typical of the NOP's sensitivity to religion was the directive of the Oblast NOO for Herzegovina in November 1944, confirming that religious holidays would continue to be respected in schools.<sup>62</sup> The District NOO for Livno reported in December that it provided food aid to poor Croat families at Christmas and to poor Muslim families at Bajram.<sup>63</sup> In January 1945 the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps ordered the District NOO for Teslić to make preparations to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, as Muslim and Catholic holidays had been celebrated previously.<sup>64</sup> The Herzegovina Oblast NOO issued a directive in April 1945 permitting optional weekly religious education classes in elementary schools. Yet this did not stop the deterioration of relations following the end of the war between the Communist regime and organised religion.

The central position of the village priests in Bosnian Serb peasant life meant that co-optation of sympathetic Orthodox clergy was one means to control the Bosnian Serb population; anti-clericalism came naturally to the Communists, but it was not a luxury they could afford in excess. Thus at the Orthodox Easter on 25 April 1943 a group of Partisan Orthodox priests including four members of AVNOJ issued an Easter greeting to the peoples of Yugoslavia. The greeting attempted to link the Orthodox religion with the Partisan struggle and claimed that 'Jesus Christ, who propagated love and brotherhood among peoples regardless of religion and nationality, who defended the small and the threatened and opposed the authorities of the Roman Empire, who opposed the violent and the rich and protected the enslaved peoples, was condemned to death and crucified'. The appeal drew a parallel between Jesus's crucifixion and the Axis campaigns against the Partisans. In this parallel the Yugoslav collaborators were the occupiers' Judases:

They sought not just one Judas but many large and small Judases and they found them. Among the Serbs—Nedić, Ljotić and Draža Mihailović; among the Croats—Pavelić; among the Slovenes—Natlačen and Pucelj; among the Montenegrins—Sekula Drljević, Baja

„Добар пастир све што каже ином  
и сам својим потврђује чином . . .“

(И. Маџурановић)

На парастосу у Мостару владика зворничко-тузлански  
др Нектарије Крупа, иначе један од главних предричних  
акционара фабрике «Соллајс», одражао је говор у коме је рекао  
да су талијански окупатори спасавали српски народ.



НАРОД: — Сачувај нас божје пастира који благосиља вукове!

Image 4: ‘The people: “God save us from the shepherds who bless wolves!”’ A cartoon in *Oslobođenje*, 16 December 1945 attacking the Orthodox bishop of the Zvornik-Tuzla diocese for his claim that the Italians had protected the Serb nation.

„Z. K. Č. i S. Z.“

Pred Vojnim sudom u Sara-  
jevu počelo je suđenje grupi  
križarskih organizatora i po-  
magača — petorici katoličkih  
svećenika, dvjema opaticama  
časnim sestrama, propalim da-  
cima iz bivše NDH, itd.



Krst časn i sloboda zlatna — za koje se bore jezuita Čondrić i njegova kompanija.

Image 5: ‘The honourable cross and golden freedom—for which the Jesuit Čondrić and his company fought’. Cartoon in *Oslobođenje*, 23 December 1945.



## THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Stanišić and Blažo Đukanović... Judas betrayed Jesus Christ; in the same way that you, Orthodox peoples and the other peoples of Yugoslavia, are betrayed to the bloody occupiers by the traitors to the people with Draža Mihailović, Pavelić and Nedić at their helm.<sup>65</sup>

One priest enrolled in the Partisans, Reverend Blažo Marković, paid tribute to the Orthodox clergy among the Partisans in an article in *Front Slobode* in November 1944:

Through the struggle of the patriotic war and heavy temptation, a huge number of the Serb clergy that arose from the people did not abandon its people. Together with the people, they shared both the good and the bad. The Serb priests went along with the people into the struggle, emboldened it and summoned it to the uprising against the occupier and its minions, our national traitors.<sup>66</sup>

Eventually, an 'Association of Serbian Orthodox People's Priests' was established in Bosnia on 22–23 October 1947, considerably earlier than its Catholic and Muslim counterparts: the 'Association of Catholic Priests', established on 25–26 January 1950, and the 'Association of Religious Officials of the Islamic Religious Community', established on 4 September 1950.

Orthodox priests were nevertheless widely identified by the Partisans as with the Chetnik enemy. This is illustrated by an unfortunate encounter that took place in November 1943 at the village of Glavatičevo in Hercegovina, where the Partisans of the Mostar Battalion came in pursuit of a band of Chetniks, only to find another group of Partisans, escorting Hercegovinian delegates to the Second Session of AVNOJ, crossing a bridge in the village. The Mostar Battalion veteran Ibro Šator recalls what happened:

With the fighters of the Mostar Battalion in control of the bridge, they saw that the bridge was being crossed by a patrol, behind which were several horse-riders and a bearded man (that was Novak Mastilović, who was then a priest with a beard and a Montenegrin cap, in what is called the turned-up style). As soon as our fighters saw the beard, they did not hesitate but opened fire with a machine-gun, which fortunately stopped working, because the cartridge jammed in the barrel.

After fifteen or twenty minutes of shooting, one of the Mostar Battalion soldiers noticed a red star on the hat of one of those who had crossed the bridge, thus identifying them as fellow Partisans and bringing the clash to an end.<sup>67</sup> The instinct of the Mostar Partisans had been to fire upon the bearded priest, who was assumed to be a Chetnik.

Much more problematic, however, was the relationship between the NOP and the Catholic Church. For the Croats, much more than for the Serbs, the division between the right and the left coincided with the division between the Catholic and the anti-clerical wings of the national movement. The Bosnian Franciscans were the heirs of a proud liberal-Catholic tradition, and some among them, including Bisop Alojzije Mišić and Fathers Viktor Šakić, Bosiljko Ljevar, Josip Markušić, Pavo Šimović, Zlatko Sivrić, Damjan Rozić and Sefarin Dodig, opposed the Ustasha's genocidal policies and defended Serb and other victims. So too did some other members of the Catholic clergy, such as Don Martin Krešić and Don Vide Putica. Indeed, the Franciscan Province of Silver Bosnia, as the central insti-



tution of the Bosnian Franciscans, organised a service at the Church of St Anthony's in Sarajevo on 15 May 1945 to offer thanks for the Partisan victory, and invited the Bosnian government to attend.<sup>68</sup> Yet the record of the Croatian Catholic Church as a whole was much more ambiguous. Broadly speaking, the division was between those, including Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac, who coupled opposition to Ustasha genocide with acceptance of the legitimacy of the NDH; and those, such as Archbishop Ivan Šarić of Sarajevo, who fervently supported the Ustasha regime. Stepinac increasingly denounced Ustasha atrocities as the war progressed and protected Serbs and Jews.<sup>69</sup> Yet such protests formed a small voice in comparison to the loudness of the Catholic press's support for the NDH. The Partisans took power in Croatia in 1945 eager on the one hand to reach an accommodation with the Church to strengthen their fledgling regime, and on the other hand bitter about the Church's wartime record.

In Bosnia the regime's relationship with the Church was complicated by the multinational composition of the population and by the fact that Croats were only a minority; policy had to take into account not only the Church's general hostility to the Partisans but also the effect it might have on the non-Croats, in particular the Serbs who comprised Bosnia's largest nationality. The NKOJ sent a message to the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH at the start of November 1944, stating that in Bosnia, unlike in Croatia the Catholics should not be allowed to provide Sunday school for Croats because there were not enough Orthodox teachers (on account of the Ustasha genocide) to provide the same service to Serbs and it would be wrong to privilege any one religion.<sup>70</sup> Yet a more serious complication arose from the fact that the Bosnian Partisan movement was spear-headed above all by Serb Communists, who upheld brotherhood and unity with Croats but for whom sympathy for the Catholic Church did not come easily. An indication of their instinctive hostility to this institution that was wholly alien to them was Čolaković's behaviour in the village of Čardak in northern Bosnia in the autumn of 1943, through which he was travelling en route to attend the ZAVNOBiH and AVNOJ congresses. Stopping outside a nunnery with a school, Čolaković was curious to see how the lessons were attended, and entered the classroom uninvited:

As soon as I appeared at the edge of the classroom, the children, as if on command, arose and said in a voice: 'Praise Jesus!' Such a reception surprised me unpleasantly, and still more unpleasant for me was the scornful look of the nun—a young and by no means unattractive person—who stood between the desks; cleanly, modestly and most suitably attired, appropriate to the uniform of her order. To my greeting, she responded just barely by nodding her head.

Čolaković addressed the nun:

'Excuse me for interrupting the lesson, but I'd like to see what the children are learning'. She did not reply, nor did she move from her spot.

I approached a desk, on which lay an open book—a reader for Year IV of elementary school. On the first page was a picture of Ante Pavelić, followed by some Ustasha poems.

'Why are you rotting the children's spirits with this poison?' I asked the teacher.

'You too have your poems'.

## THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

‘And why don’t you teach the children to sing some Partisan songs?’

The teacher looked at me, frightened, as if I had spoken who knows what kind of blasphemous words, and then replied quietly:

‘We have not yet been ordered to do so’.

Čolaković thereupon decided to take it upon himself to improve the ideological character of the lesson:

‘Children, do you know who the Partisans are?’

The children gasped and nudged each other somewhat, and then one chubby, mouthy little boy got up, snorted thunderously and fired off:

‘The Partisans destroy churches and kill Croats!’

‘And who taught you that?’

The boy looked at me confused—he had obviously learnt that in school, and now it was strange to him that I had not praised him for such a reply.

‘Fine things you are teaching your students, sister’, I replied ironically, ‘but we do not have the time now to concern ourselves with this. But be aware that you will sooner or later be held responsible for this’.

The teacher stood in the same spot and looked at the ground.

I wanted immediately to leave this suffocating monastic atmosphere for the fresh air, but the passion of the agitator got the better of me, and I attempted to tell the children a little of our struggle; to explain to them who the Partisans were. The children were more looking at than listening to me—they were obviously more interested in my appearance than in what I was saying. Excusing myself from them, I said to them ‘Death to Fascism!’, which remained without a response, but as I walked towards the door, they once again jumped to their feet and sent me on my way with a thunderous ‘Praise be to Jesus!’<sup>71</sup>

Čolaković went on his way, pondering the encounter and lamenting privately how ‘the Ustashes in habits are rotting the spirits of this honourable world and how they are just holding them firmly in their claws!’ He concluded: ‘Following the liberation of our country, we shall have to fight determinedly for the Bosnian Croats, and we shall have to be very strict towards their errors and prejudices.’<sup>72</sup>

Partisan anti-clericalism in Bosnia stemmed not only from Communist ideology but also from the traditional anti-clericalism of the more liberal wing of the Croat national movement, and prominent HSS members in the NOP often took the lead in attacks on the Church. The first Croat to speak at the Third Session of ZAVNOBiH, Jure Begić of the HSS, delivered a blistering attack against the Catholic Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina, claiming that it responded to the establishment of the NDH in a uniformly treasonous matter: ‘So that the Croat people would not turn to the right path, but to the Ustashes, at that moment, almost the entire Bosnian Catholic priesthood entered the political arena and, with all its strength, endeavoured to press the Croat peasants into the Ustasha ranks.’ Begić appealed to the new government to take firm action against the Catholic priesthood, ‘that they request most energetically of the Church authorities that they immediately replace those priests who actively worked against the P[eo]ple’s L[iberation] Movement, and in their place appoint others who are

more tolerant'.<sup>73</sup> Bogomir Brajković, another HSS member, spoke likewise at the Third Session: 'I deem it my duty as a Croat and as a representative of the HSS in our Executive Council of our P[eople's] L[iberation] Front, to condemn the work of the great part of the Catholic priesthood on the entire territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina.'<sup>74</sup>

Following the end of the war the Communists in Bosnia continued their alliance with the minority in the HSS that had participated in the People's Liberation Front. On 11 September 1945 an all-Bosnia conference of the pro-Partisan section of the HSS, now renamed the 'Croat Republican Peasant Party' (HRSS), was convened in order to secure as much as possible of the HSS popular base for the new order. Ten days earlier the Provincial Committee had instructed all *okrug* committees to 'help this conference; offer full aid, endeavouring that good representatives come to the conference, and that it concern itself with the transport of the delegates'. The HRSS was to serve as the KPJ's front for co-opting the Croat masses: 'In the HRSS organisations, there must be reached a firm alliance of Communists and HRSS supporters, which means that all those Party members who are not known as Communists should enter the councils of the HRSS.'<sup>75</sup> At this conference, 'Dr Grgurić emphasised that this is the first time that the representatives of the Croats from all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina have convened, who are able, with complete legitimacy, to speak and work in the name of the Croat nation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.' Prominent HSS politicians such as Franjo Gazi and Stjepan Prvčić praised the memory of the martyred HSS founder Stjepan Radić, and described Tito as his true heir. According to the elderly Tuna Babić, a founding member of the original HSS, 'We have today at the helm of the state a man who is the true heir of Matija Gubec and the Radić brothers, and that is Marshal Tito, under whose leadership we are going to a new, better and happier life.'<sup>76</sup> This conference was also intended to make clear the distinctiveness of the Bosnian Croats within the Croat nation generally, as a constituent part of federated Bosnia-Herzegovina, as Brajković made clear, stating that 'although they are firmly politically linked with the whole Croat nation, yet in certain affairs they must take responsibility alone'. Brajković took the opportunity to blame the Catholic clergy for the poor level of Bosnian Croat support for the NOP, in contrast to the Croats elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> This left wing of the mainstream Bosnian Croat national movement would provide the ideological shock troops for the impending conflict with the Catholic Church.

During and immediately after the war, the Communists vigorously expressed their support for religious freedom. The regime newspaper *Sarajevski Dnevnik* published prominent greetings from local shops and businesses to their Muslim customers at Bajram and to their Catholic and Orthodox customers at Christmas and Easter.<sup>78</sup> The new Yugoslav government initially sought to reach an accommodation with the Catholic Church. However, this policy was derailed by the issuing of a pastoral letter by the Croatian Catholic Bishops' Conference to the Catholic public on 20 September 1945, cataloguing the government's persecution of the clergy, restrictions on Church rights and eroding of Catholic moral values by such means as civil marriage, Darwinian teaching and all-night dances. The letter demanded complete freedom of the Catholic press, schools and other organisations and respect for Church property and Catholic marriage. The follow-

ing day the bishops issued a second letter, this time to the clergy, denouncing the government's secularist reforms, including the separation of church and state, lay education, secular marriage and confiscation of Church property.<sup>79</sup> Finally, on 22 September the bishops wrote to Tito himself, demanding that these grievances be addressed.<sup>80</sup> This virtual declaration of war, issued at the most delicate possible time, on the eve of the elections, provoked a bitter conflict between the government and the Church, culminating in the arrest and trial of Archbishop Stepinac in the autumn of 1946. The Church was viewed by the regime as the spearhead of the opposition to it; as the Sarajevo City Council reported: 'In the elections for the Constituent Assembly, it was above all the Roman Catholic priests and nuns who voted for the "box without a list" [i.e. for the opposition list], which is a sign that, within their ranks, they stand determinedly on the side of reaction.'<sup>81</sup>

Due to the Church's opposition to the regime, the Croat population in some areas abstained from voting in the election for the Constituent Assembly, or voted for the 'box without a list'. Even in the traditionally left-wing and pro-Partisan Croat bastion of Husino and Kreka a significant number of Croats voted against the regime.<sup>82</sup> Croats had already been the most reluctant of the three principal Bosnian nationalities to support the NOP. The conflict with the Church now widened the breach and proved highly damaging to both the Bosnian Croats and the regime; the former became the most downtrodden and alienated of the three nationalities under the new order, while the latter, already restricted in its basis of popular support, found itself further deprived of the goodwill of a large section of the population.

In Bosnia the Minister of Forestry Ante Martinović, an HRSS member, retaliated against the Church in an election rally in Sarajevo on 18 October. After denouncing the Church's betrayal of the sixteenth-century Croatian peasant rebel leader Matija Gubec, Martinović remarked that 'we know that the bishops today are not raising their heads on behalf of the Croatian nation, but on behalf of themselves'. His speech received front-page coverage in *Sarajevski Dnevnik*.<sup>83</sup> Yet this anti-clericalism did not imply ideological hostility to Croat culture as such—at this stage, the Communists permitted the left wing of the Croat national movement a certain flowering, as a key part of their attempt to consolidate their regime and meet the challenge of the Church. On 15 October the reconstituted Bosnian Croat cultural society 'Napredak' held its first meeting in Mostar, followed by its general assembly on 28 October. On Christmas Day 1945 an article by Vladimir Čaldarović, President of Napredak, appeared on the front page of *Sarajevski Dnevnik* celebrating the spirit of the holiday: 'Christmas, a holiday of intimate celebration of the individual and family, has always been a great holiday for all the Slavic peoples, and for us Croats too.' However, Čaldarović laid stress on Christmas as a national rather than a religious holiday, dating back to pagan times; one that the Church had simply adopted, 'a holiday of freedom, justice and peace', which could not be celebrated by those who, 'in the vestments of priests, betrayed the teaching of Christ' and 'blessed and protected the burners of Serb, Muslim and Croat homes and the murderers of our patriots'.<sup>84</sup> Regime propaganda in this period, meanwhile, became increasingly virulent in its anti-Catholicism, something that did not abate over the course of the year that followed and led up to the trial of Stepinac.

The anti-clericalism of the pro-regime HRSS was not merely opportunistic, but drew on a strong tradition of Bosnian Croat folk religiosity represented by the native Franciscans, which had clashed with the official Church structures ever since these had been reimposed on Bosnia-Herzegovina by the occupying Austro-Hungarians after 1878. At a conference of the HRSS in Sarajevo on 3 October Pero Andrijašević, vice-president of the Sarajevo district HRSS organisation, stated: 'The unpatriotic stance of the clerico-fascists traces its roots to long ago, when the Latin Church, in all possible ways, hindered the development of the Croatian national church and made Croatian national thought impossible.'<sup>85</sup> During the deliberations of the Bosnian Constitutional Assembly Brajković paid tribute to the Franciscan poet Father Andrija Kačić-Miošić, while citing the persecution of the medieval Bosnian Church by the Papacy: 'In the misty and insufficiently researched time of the Bosnian *bans* and kings, the Bosnian peasant did not suffer only the oppression of his feudal lords, but the Roman Pope organised frequent crusades into Bosnia, to destroy Bogumilism, which was called the "Bosnian Church."' Brajković linked this tradition to the contemporary struggle against the Church:

By promulgating this constitution and bringing it fully into life, we shall certainly completely obstruct the influence over the Croat nation of those dark, reactionary, Ustasha Stepinac-Šarić remnants, who all today recognise as their representative the émigré Maček, who has placed himself in the service of foreign reaction against his own nation of birth.<sup>86</sup>

Rhetoric of this kind had only a very limited resonance among the Croat masses, who were far from universal in finding the HRSS convincing as a genuine Croat party or in voting for it in the elections to the Constituent Assembly.<sup>87</sup>

State repression against the Church, involving the arrest and occasionally killing of priests, remained severe from the autumn of 1945 onward. Meanwhile, the Communists established firm control over all aspects of Bosnian Croat cultural and political life, so that of fifty-seven members of Napredak's assembly elected in 1946 seventeen were regime loyalists, of whom nine were members of the Party and police apparatus.<sup>88</sup>

In the spring of 1949 the regime arrested a number of prominent Bosnian Franciscans, including the Provincial of Silver Bosnia, Father Vitomir Jeličić. This atmosphere of regime intimidation helped bring about the election of a new administration for the Province of Silver Bosnia, headed by Father Josip Markušić, which was considered to be less antagonistic towards the regime. On 25 June the new administration sent a directive to the Franciscans of the Province requesting that they be loyal towards the government. Following this, on 4 August Father Josip wrote to Tito, pledging to him and the government the loyalty of the Province, reminding him of the Franciscans' role in safeguarding the South Slavs' national consciousness, culture and learning in the Ottoman period and requesting the fulfilment of several modest demands, above all respect for the free functioning of Franciscan institutions, an end to the misuse of Franciscan buildings by the authorities and the release of imprisoned friars. Finally, on 22 September Tito received a Franciscan delegation headed by Father Josip, which 'announced their readiness to invest all their energy in collaborating with the people's authorities'.<sup>89</sup>

This was part of a genuine process of ideological transformation within the Bosnian Croat national movement, not simply repression. The period appears to

have permanently shifted the orientation of Bosnian Croat national ideology away from the Church. The increasing repression against not just the Church but Bosnian Croats generally, following the Tito–Stalin split of 1948, ensured that the Communists from among Bosnian Croat ranks were, if anything, less representative of their nationality than their Serb and Muslim counterparts. Yet the generation of Bosnian Croat nationalists that emerged from the fall of Communism in the 1990s was drawn from precisely these former Communist *apparatchiks*, their nationalism in direct correlation to their former Communist loyalty. They continued to find themselves in frequently uneasy relations with the Croatian Catholic Church. The latter, under such figures as Cardinals Franjo Kuharić and Vinko Puljić, again acted as a restraining influence, during the Bosnian war of the 1990s, on the excesses of Croat nationalism. Thus the traditional tension within Bosnian Croat national politics continued to play itself out.

### *The Muslim national identity and the Communist dilemma*

The Communists, as we have seen, stressed in their wartime propaganda the equality of Serbs, Muslims and Croats within Bosnia–Hercegovina without formally recognising the Muslims as a nation. After the Muslims were belatedly recognised as a nation in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia in 1968 Titoist historians strove to highlight the roots of this act as going back to Communist policy during World War II and before. Thus Atif Purivatra, Titoist Yugoslavia's leading theorist of Muslim nationhood, argues that in the NOP, to all intents and purposes, the Muslims were treated as a separate nation in Partisan propaganda.<sup>90</sup> The Central Committee's treatment of the Muslims as the sixth Yugoslav people in its Mayday proclamation of 1 May 1944 was repeated by Tito himself a year later on 9 May 1945 in his radio address to the Yugoslav people, when he spoke to the 'Peoples of Yugoslavia! Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims!'<sup>91</sup> Yet this de facto recognition never translated into de jure recognition.

The impasse over formal recognition of Muslim nationhood reflected a genuine uncertainty over the question among the top ranks of the KPJ, in which different individuals held different views. Those who went on record most clearly as opponents of the concept of a Muslim nation tended to be Communists from Serbia and Montenegro, in particular Moša Pijade and Milovan Đilas, whereas Rodoljub Čolaković, Đuro Pucar and other Bosnian Serb Communists tended to be more sympathetic, or at least more open-minded on the question. This was not necessarily a question of a greater or lesser degree of Serb or Montenegrin chauvinism so much as genuine uncertainty, in which the Bosnian Serbs, with greater knowledge of and familiarity with Muslims, understood the question better. Similarly, at the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Serbia in May 1945, it was Velibor Ljujić, a delegate from the town of Novi Pazar in the Sanjak, a territory in Serbia with a mixed Muslim and Serb population, who spoke against the idea of assimilating the Muslims into the Serb nation:

There are Communist comrades of ours who believe that the Muslims should be included in the Serbs. When it was necessary to determine the national composition of the Party, some of our comrades in the leadership included all Muslims among the Serbs. I believe

that the Muslims should remain as Muslims, as a national group, not that they should be included among the Serbs.<sup>92</sup>

Conversely, those within the NOP who pressed for the affirmation of Muslim nationhood were not so much Muslim Communists as the Partisans' non-Communist Muslim collaborators such as Muhamed Sudžuka and Muhamed Hadžijahić. In this context, the lack of clarity on the part of the Communists on the question represented a compromise between two currents of thought within the movement.<sup>93</sup>

The Communists' confusion over the Muslim question was also a reflection of the confusion among the Muslims themselves, for although before the war the Muslims had mostly rejected assimilation into the Serb and Croat national movements and affirmed their separate identity, they had tended to view this identity as religious rather than national; this was reflected in their very choice of the name 'Muslim' in preference to 'Bosniak', ever since the Austro-Hungarian period.<sup>94</sup> Insofar as their national identity was religious in origin, the Muslims were no different from the Bosnian Serbs, who had struggled during the Austro-Hungarian period against the regime's multi-religious schools. The religious origin of all three Bosnian national identities was a product of the segregation of the Ottoman state and administration along religious lines. The Muslims were slowest to make the transition and at the time of writing this is still not complete; paradoxically, the official adoption of the Bosniak name in place of the Muslim name in 1993 went hand in hand with a greater affirmation of the Islamic underpinning of this nationhood. Nevertheless, the NOP took a major step along the road of the 'nationalisation' of the Muslims.

The KPJ's principal theorist of the Muslim question during the NOP was Veselin Masleša, a Bosnian Serb from Banja Luka. Masleša had no position within the Bosnian Communist organisation; he was attached to the Supreme Staff as a member of the Central Agitation-Propaganda Department. In his text *The Muslim Question*, written in 1942, Masleša argued that 'the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina are not a nation' since 'they genuinely do not have a single one of the objectively necessary characteristics that comprise a nation, nor do they have a subjective consciousness—the logical consequence of objective characteristics—of themselves as a nation'; rather, they were 'a religious-political grouping'. The 'Muslim question' was, wrote Masleša, created and kept alive by the Muslim *begs* to maintain the feudal privileges they had acquired under the Ottoman Empire: 'The merging of feudal privileges and Islam—that is the historical root of the "Muslim question."' The Muslim quest for autonomy was therefore, in Masleša's view, the reactionary demand of the Muslim elite for the retention of its feudal privileges: 'The demand for political autonomy as well as the virtual autonomy of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian feudalists represented and continues to represent the fundamental political form of the "Muslim question", as the *begs* posed it and continue to pose it.' Popular Muslim support for the Muslim autonomy of the *begs* was an expression of the 'passive stance of the Muslim masses in history; the proverbial passive stance of the Muslim person', which the *begs* were able to manipulate for their selfish and reactionary ends.

The failure to resolve the Muslim question in inter-war Yugoslavia was, argued Masleša, the product of an unholy alliance between the JMO as a 'feudal-political



organisation' on the one hand and 'Belgrade Great Serb hegemony' on the other, for the latter preferred to collaborate with and keep alive the former as a way of controlling Bosnia-Herzegovina and preventing the politicisation of the Muslim masses on a more radical basis: 'To the Belgrade rulers, reactionary and Great Serb without exception, it seemed that it would be much more favourable not to destroy an already formed political organisation, whose leadership was ready to listen and to compromise', for 'how much easier it was to barter politically with a defunct feudal clique than to struggle with a politically active mass, which could have been born in the event of the political destruction of the JMO'. Masleša argued that the Muslim question would solve itself with the Muslim masses' mobilisation in the NOP, the implication being that as they freed themselves of the influence of the Muslim elite and ceased to feel threatened as a religious group, they would assimilate into the Serb and Croat nations and cease to support autonomous Muslim politics.<sup>95</sup> This was essentially a Communist reworking of the view of the Muslims held by the People's Radical Party, the principal Great Serb nationalist party of inter-war Yugoslavia. Its negative stereotyping of the 'Muslim person' and its portrayal of the Muslim identity as a reactionary anachronism could only have been deeply insulting to any patriotic Muslim. Masleša himself was killed at the Battle of the Sutjeska. Nevertheless, his text continued to be used to 'educate' the Partisan rank and file up till the end of the war, even in Muslim Partisan units.<sup>96</sup>

The policy of viewing Muslims simply as 'undeclared' Serbs or Croats was nevertheless increasingly out of favour by the end of the war, given the stress in NOP propaganda on the brotherhood and equality of Croats, Muslims and Serbs, which effectively portrayed the Muslims as a nationality in their own right, while the NOP's opposition to Great Serb and Great Croat chauvinism acted to discourage assimilation of the Muslims into either of the neighbouring peoples. Typical of Partisan propaganda in this regard was the *Annual of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade*, a collection of articles by the officers and soldiers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade published to commemorate the first anniversary of its foundation. The word 'Muslim' was printed with a large 'M' throughout, thereby treating the Muslims as a nationality rather than a religious group—in Serbo-Croat, the names of nationalities were capitalised while the names of religious groups were not. In this volume, Arif Tanović, on behalf of the Muslim youth of the brigade, effectively affirmed the national tradition and particularity of the Muslims and their manifestation through the NOP:

The Muslim youth, through its struggle, has deserved its greatest victory, and that is: the decisions of the Second Session of AVNOJ, through which Bosnia-Herzegovina has received autonomy. That is the age-old aspiration of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Muslim youth in the P[eople's] L[iberation] Army, gun in hand, resolves the Muslim question and soon will bring freedom and equality to the Muslims of Yugoslavia in the future federative democratic Yugoslavia.<sup>97</sup>

Another theoretical viewpoint contrary to Masleša's, one that was more explicit in its affirmation of Bosnian Muslim nationhood and thus went beyond what a Communist would have said while nevertheless remaining in the spirit of the times, was provided by Josip Smoljaka, an eminent non-Communist Croatian politician of the pre-war period who had gone over to the Partisans. Smoljaka

wrote a tract defending the Partisan model for a federal Yugoslavia from its critics, which was published by the 1<sup>st</sup> Krajina Brigade in 1944. He claimed that the Muslims had already existed as a distinct nationality before the war:

Official truth recognised only three nations, according to the formula of the S[erbs,] C[roats and] S[lovenes]. In reality, there was in the consciousness of the people of Yugoslavia, and in their heart, three more South Slavic nationalities: one forbidden (Macedonian), one secret (Bosnian) and one in a state of flux (Montenegrians)... In Bosnia, beside the Serbs and Croats, there was formally recognised a third national group equal to them, but under the religious name 'Muslims'. The Bosnian name was avoided not only by the regime, but by our own Muslim people, even though, when abroad, all of them were proud of the Bosnian name.

According to Smodlaka: "This Bosnianism [*Bosanstvo*] will remain in Yugoslavia the "shy nationality", until the last Bosnians—and those are Muslims who, on account of their religion and other particular traditions and characteristics, cannot declare themselves as either Serbs or as Croats—are recognised as a nation under their national name."<sup>98</sup>

Pucar, as we have seen, spoke at the Second Session of ZAVNOBiH in favour of the establishment of a Muslim political council as a means of winning Muslim acceptance of the NOP. It appears that this idea was initially rejected by the Muslim Communist leaders of the People's Liberation Front, who were wedded to the idea of a monolithic political leadership for Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which there was no place for national divisions. Pucar in March 1945 blamed the absence of such a body for the failure of the NOP to put down firmer roots among the Muslim population.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, following the end of the war, a 'General Council of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina' was indeed established in Sarajevo on 22 May 1945 as a political and representative body with an undefined competence.<sup>100</sup>

At the session of the presidency of the Bosnian parliament on 26 May 1945 Hamdija Čemerlić complained that the word 'Muslim' was being written with a small letter 'm' in official documents, implying that the Muslims were a religious group rather than a nationality. Čemerlić pointed out that:

Comrade Marshal Tito, in his message to the peoples of Yugoslavia of 9 May on the occasion of the victory holiday, addressed a proclamation to the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes etc. and Muslims, and this was reproduced by [the newspaper] *Borba* with a large 'M'. I do not see why the term 'Muslim' should not be printed with a big letter, the same as with 'Serb' and 'Croat.'

Čolaković agreed: "'Muslim' is a specific term for Bosnia-Herzegovina, and when "Muslim" is written in Bosnia-Herzegovina then this does not refer to one of the many Muslims scattered all over the world.' Čolaković was therefore 'of the opinion that in legal texts and in all other places, the term "Muslim" be written with a big letter'. The proposal was accepted unanimously.<sup>101</sup>

The Communists were highly concerned in this period to retain Muslim popular goodwill. Pucar resisted the transfer of Avdo Humo, as the most eminent Bosnian Muslim Communist, to duty in Belgrade, on the grounds that:

the departure of Comrade Avdo would mean for our movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina a great loss, which would not in the slightest be compensated for by his work in his new job.

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Comrade Avdo is among the Muslims an eminent political figure; in addition to that a person who has all the conditions to battle with the Muslim reaction. In that regard he is totally irreplaceable. We in B[osnia-]H[erzegovina] will for a long time need qualified Muslim cadres for work among the Muslims, who are much more conservative than the Serbs and who prefer to listen to a Muslim than to a Serb.<sup>102</sup>

On 8 August the Reis ul-Ulema requested that the working day for Muslim state and public officials should be reduced to 9 am to 3pm to enable them to observe Ramadan, on the grounds that this concession had been enjoyed by them in previous years—that is, under the former regime. The Bosnian government responded the next day, granting the concession.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, such appeasement of Muslim sentiment was undertaken only in accordance with the principles of the NOP. Thus on 30 June the Bosnian Ministry of Justice issued a directive regulating the administration of sharia law, requiring the sharia legal organs to uphold the principle of the equality of the sexes, respect women's rights in the field of divorce and reject future polygamous marriages.<sup>104</sup>

The General Council of Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, comprising representatives from all over Bosnia-Herzegovina, met on 23 September 1945 at the home of the Gajret cultural society—which had contributed so many prominent non-Communist Muslim notables to the NOP—to take decisions regarding the future path of the Bosnian Muslims. The following day, the General Council resolved to found a new, all-Muslim cultural society, known as *Preporod* (Rebirth), with the aim of replacing the two Muslim cultural societies of the pre-war period, the pro-Serb Gajret and the pro-Croat Narodna Uzdanica. At the event marking the occasion, held at the Sarajevo city hall, Fazlija Alikalfić paid tribute to the legacy of both Gajret and Narodna Uzdanica, but explained how the first had fallen under the Belgrade regime's influence after World War I, while the second had developed along Croat lines: 'Thus, through educational activities, the harmful division of the Muslim masses into two camps was confirmed.' By contrast, the new cultural society Preporod was a means to the 'political unity' of the 'Muslim masses'.<sup>105</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup>, both Gajret and Narodna Uzdanica held their annual conferences, at which each of them voted to merge with Preporod. In each case, the conferences were presided over by prominent Muslim NOP supporters, Zaim Šarac for Gajret and Sulejman Filipović for Narodna Uzdanica, who paid tribute to the histories of the respective societies while justifying the need for a merger.<sup>106</sup>

The Communist regime at this stage sought to co-opt rather than suppress the Muslim elite and its cultural institutions, and this meant in practice encouraging the formation of a unified Bosnian Muslim nation behind official institutions. However, already there were signs that the regime could not fully stage-manage even such apparently tame manifestations of Muslim national affirmation. At the founding congress of Preporod the event was disrupted by the presence of a large number of Young Muslim radicals, including a youthful Alija Izetbegović, future President of post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina, who through filibustering tactics apparently succeeded in forcing the inclusion of several of their members in the administration of the new cultural society. Following the event Izetbegović was arrested but he was released the next day, as the regime was not yet ready to crush the Young Muslims.<sup>107</sup>

More problematic for the Communists, in this period, than the question of Muslim nationhood was integrating the Muslim national past into their mythologised version of Yugoslav history in which the 'revolutionary' heritage of each nation was stressed. The Communists presented their liberation struggle as falling within the revolutionary tradition of all the Yugoslav nations and claimed the mantle of 'great' Serbs and Croats of the past. Among these were the sixteenth-century Croat peasant rebel Matija Gubec, the early nineteenth-century Serbian leader of the anti-Ottoman uprising Kara Đorđe Petrović, the Bosnian Serb nationalists Vaso Pelagić and Petar Kočić, the Bosnian Serb assassin of Franz Ferdinand, Gavrilo Princip, and the HSS leader Stjepan Radić. Thus, for example, a Partisan propaganda bulletin describing a rally at Bastaši near Drvar in August 1941 suggested that the Serb Partisans were following in the tradition of Vaso Pelagić, Petar Kočić and Gavrilo Princip, while the Croat Partisans were following in the tradition of Matija Gubec.<sup>108</sup> A plaque commemorating Princip as a fighter against the Germans was erected in Sarajevo in May 1945, though for most Sarajevans, particularly non-Serbs, he was not a popular figure.<sup>109</sup>

The problem was that modern Serb nationalism was founded upon a mythologised view of centuries of Serb resistance to Ottoman rule, so that all aspects of the Ottoman legacy were viewed in an entirely negative light. For the Muslims, by contrast, the Ottoman conquest had brought them their religion and laid the basis for their nationhood. Given the extent to which Serb nationalism had influenced the South Slav socialist tradition, it was all but impossible for the Communists to re-evaluate the Ottoman and Islamic legacy in a manner that would make the Muslims truly equal to the Serbs and the Croats. In other words, the Ottoman legacy and the Islamic heritage were not deemed politically correct.

Consequently, the KPJ's efforts to present the People's Liberation Struggle as a patriotic struggle in the tradition of past uprisings against the Ottomans and Habsburgs led them to negate the patriotic tradition of the Muslim nationality in their school programmes in liberated territory. Thus the Educational Department of the Executive Council of AVNOJ's curriculum for primary schools, established under the Bihać Republic, required the teaching of such Serb and Croat historical figures as Sava Nemanjić, Nikola Šubić Zrinski, Josip Strossmayer, Vuk Karadžić, Petar Petrović Njegoš, Matija Gubec and Arsenije Carnojević, but the only ethnic Muslim mentioned was Osman Đikić, a political radical of the Austro-Hungarian period who was unrepresentative of most Muslims and who identified himself as a Serb nationalist. Children were to be taught the 'Struggle of the Yugoslavs against the Turks', the '*uskoks* and *hajduks*' (Croat and Serb outlaws who fought the Ottomans), the 'Turkish conquest of Yugoslav lands', the 'liberation of Montenegro' (from the Ottomans), the 'exodus of the Serbs under Arsenije Carnojević' (to escape Ottoman persecution) and the 'struggle against the Dahis and the people's uprisings in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina' (against the Ottomans). This was intended to 'acquaint pupils with the development of our nations in the past and present and bring them up in the People's Liberation national spirit'.<sup>110</sup>

The Partisans were taught to identify themselves as the heirs to the anti-Ottoman rebels of Yugoslav, particularly in Serb folklore. There were no elements of the curriculum that appealed to the history of the Muslims; no mention of patriotic Muslim historical figures such as Hećim-oglu Ali Paša, who defeated the

Austrians at Banja Luka in 1737 and saved the Muslims from annihilation, or Husein-Kapetan Gradašćević, the leader of the Bosnian rebellion against the Ottomans in 1831, or even Salih Vilajetović ('Hadži Lojo'), who commanded rebel forces that resisted the Austro-Hungarian conquest of Bosnia in 1878; no suggestion of a positive side to the Ottoman legacy. Acceptance of the equality of the Muslims with the Serbs and Croats did not lead to acceptance of their national past as part of the Yugoslav or Bosnian patriotic legacy. This may have been linked to the fact that there were no Muslim members of the Educational Department, though it is questionable whether the non-Muslim members would have under any circumstances accepted the insertion of important Muslim historical figures into the curriculum. Both Serb and Croat Communists simply took it for granted that in the history of the Christian-Muslim confrontation in the Balkans the Christians were the heroes and the Muslims the villains. Thus Masleša, as head of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the KPJ, insisted that the fiercely anti-Muslim nineteenth-century Serb patriotic poem 'The Mountain Wreath' by Petar Petrović Njegoš must be recited without any censorship of its Christian patriotism by actors staging a performance at a military hospital in December 1942.<sup>111</sup>

The anti-Ottoman, anti-Islamic slant to Bosnian history made its way into the 'Teaching Plan, Programme and Methodical Instruction for People's Elementary Schools', presented by the Department of People's Education to the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH on 20 November 1944. As already noted, the Plan sought to teach children about the medieval independent Bosnian state and its rulers. Yet there was no positive acknowledgement of the Ottoman period or of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Islamic heritage. Instead, children were to learn of 'Slavery under the Turks. The resistance of the Serb nation against the Turkish rulers: the *hajduks*, *uskoks* (on the basis of figures from folk poems: Starina Novak, Starac Vujadin, Smiljanić Ilija, Senjanin Ivo, Janković Stojan).' This was an entirely Christian and predominantly Serb selection of Bosnian national heroes. Children were to learn also of the Montenegrins' 'Struggle against the Turks'; of the 1804 uprising in Serbia against the Ottomans in Serbia and the folk poems that celebrated it; and—at the next educational level—of the 'establishment of new Serbian states' by the anti-Ottoman rebels in Serbia; of 'the resistance of the Croat nation against foreign rule'; and of Matija Gubec's sixteenth-century peasant uprising in Croatia. The Muslims were entirely ironed out in this version of Bosnian history, while Bosnia as a homeland with its own distinct historical and patriotic tradition was de-emphasised in favour of a general history of the South Slavs, in which Serb and Croat national history took pride of place.<sup>112</sup> This pattern was then followed in plans for the teaching of history issued after the war's end.<sup>113</sup>

The long-term effect of such a policy was that while the Muslims were belatedly recognised as a nation in 1968 as a delayed consequence of the Partisan victory, their historical past was never rehabilitated under the Communist regime. Yugoslav historiography continued to demonise the Ottoman past instead of viewing it, like the Roman and Byzantine periods, as part of the Yugoslav peoples' heritage. For most Serbs, identification with the Ottoman legacy was and is as unthinkable as identification with the Dutch or British colonial legacies was and is for black South Africans. The Communists could uphold as heroes royal, aristo-

cratic or clerical Christian Serb and Croat historical figures such as Nemanjić, Zrinski and Njegoš, but not their Muslim counterparts. In the long run this made the demonisation of Islam and the Muslims by the Serb nationalists of the 1990s and their efforts to deny the historical existence of the Muslim nation that much easier to sell to the Serb people. The Communists went much further than any previous rulers of Bosnia-Herzegovina in their recognition of Muslim national rights; however, this was not without its ambiguities.

### *Muslim pressure for national recognition*

The NOP in Bosnia represented a synthesis between two principal politically conscious elements: the Communists and the Muslim autonomists. The Communists were overwhelmingly the stronger partner in the alliance, but they needed the Muslim autonomists to win over the Muslim masses and were forced to give their non-Communist Muslim collaborators a certain leeway. While military figures such as Sulejman Filipović and Omer Gluhić were ready to play the part of docile Communist front-men, politicians were less ready to do so and tended to pursue their own policies, using the NOP as the Communists attempted to use them. Hasan Miljković returned to the pro-Axis fold after a brief collaboration with the NOP. Ismet Bektašević and Hafiz Muhamed efendi Pandža joined the NOP but were alleged to have returned to collaboration with the Germans, for which the Communists executed the former and sentenced the latter to life imprisonment. Yet other Muslim figures went against Communist policy, not by vacillating between the NOP and the enemy but by pursuing their own Muslim line within the NOP. Nurija Pozderac was loyal to the NOP, but irked the Communists with his independent political activities in the Cazinska Krajina in late 1942 and early 1943. Pozderac was killed at the Battle of the Sutjeska, but non-Communist Muslims who subsequently joined the NOP followed his example.

Muhamed Sudžuka, one of the most prominent non-Communist Muslims in the NOP, was expelled from ZAVNOBiH by its Presidency on 18 February 1945. Sudžuka had been involved in the discussions over Bosnia-Herzegovina's constitutional status that had preceded the First Session of ZAVNOBiH and Second Session of AVNOJ, when he argued strongly for the equality of Bosnia-Herzegovina with other Yugoslav lands and for the status of the Muslims to be recognised. As a member of the Presidency of ZAVNOBiH Sudžuka had continued to pursue the Bosnian Muslim autonomist case. He argued, furthermore, for Bosnia-Herzegovina's financial independence within Yugoslavia.<sup>114</sup> Yet in promoting Muslim self-affirmation, he appears to have exceeded the bounds of what the Communists considered acceptable and it is highly likely that this was a reason for his expulsion. In his memoirs, Čolaković wrote contemptuously of Sudžuka: 'He was a fervent spokesman for the particular interests of the Muslims in our movement, believing that he alone had been summoned to speak in their name.' Čolaković confirms that Sudžuka stood by his pre-war belief that the Muslims should act as the lynchpin of Yugoslavia: 'That is, that we should establish a Yugoslav nation as soon as possible; the yeast for that nation would be a Bosnian nation, in which, again, the yeast would be the Muslims.'<sup>115</sup> Todor Vujasinović claims that Sudžuka arrived in Jajce for the Second Session of AVNOJ determined to advance the

interests of the Muslims: 'He again raved of the need to "guarantee the interests" of the Muslims; of some sort of Bosnian nation and the like.'<sup>116</sup> Immediately before Sudžuka's expulsion from ZAVNOBiH Pucar explained to Ranković, organisational secretary of the Central Committee, why he was being expelled and why he would need to be expelled from the Presidency of AVNOJ as well: 'By concluding this, it will make things much easier for us and we shall be able publicly to wage the struggle against him and that clique that has gathered around him, that has the tendency to act as a separate group among the Muslims, in opposition to our movement.'<sup>117</sup>

Kecmanović listed the formal reasons for Sudžuka's expulsion as being that he 'exhibited hostile conceptions, and as a member of ZAVNOBiH linked himself with reactionary and hostile elements, giving them instructions and regular support in their activities against the People's Liberation Struggle'; that he 'endeavoured, out of his selfish cliqueish interests, to turn the Muslims away from the path of their full involvement in the People's Liberation Struggle'; and that he 'linked himself with hostile elements on non-liberated territory'. The Presidency, including its non-Communist and Muslim members, voted unanimously to expel him and suggest to the Presidency of AVNOJ that it should likewise exclude him from membership; the Partisan purge of Sudžuka was thus a Bosnian decision taken autonomously. The Presidency resolved at the same time to request that his place in the Presidency of AVNOJ should be taken by Jakov Grgurić.<sup>118</sup> Sudžuka would be periodically harassed and placed under house arrest for the first fifteen post-war years, although Pucar intervened several times on his behalf, until in 1960 Tito eventually relented and ended his persecution, apparently at the intervention of Sudžuka's wife.<sup>119</sup>

Husein Čišić, known as Husaga Čišić, was a veteran non-Communist politician from Mostar who had served as mayor of the city and senator in the Yugoslav parliament. He had campaigned for Muslim autonomy in the Austro-Hungarian period, when he was repeatedly arrested for his political agitation, and went on to become a theorist of Bosnian autonomy in the interwar period.<sup>120</sup> He campaigned in favour of Bosnian autonomy following the Cvetković-Maček Sporazum and was one of the instigators of the Mostar Resolution of 1941 condemning Ustasha crimes. As a delegate to the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly in 1945, he caused a stir through proposing a controversial amendment to the Draft Constitution. In an extended written appeal to the Minister for the Constituent Assembly on 5 December, Čišić argued:

According to the conclusions of AVNOJ, every federated unit, by its act of declaration, has won the right to its own national name; only this right has been withheld from the Bosnian federated unit; a unit which namely, by explicit statement, is exceptionally founded upon national equality—of the Serbs, Croats and some such.

Consequently:

By this, presumably, accidental oversight on AVNOJ's part, a severe injustice has been committed against our immediate homeland Bosnia—a Bosnia which, by virtue of its history and of the role that it has played in the People's Liberation Struggle, as well as of the losses incurred in this war, has the right to its national self-determination; in other words, to its national name, certainly as much as does every other federated unit mentioned above.



Čišić saw in this omission the legacy of Bosnia-Herzegovina's history of oppression and partition in the interwar Yugoslav kingdom and a lack of a guarantee that such would not reoccur in the future.

Čišić honed in on the failure of the new Yugoslav state coat of arms to accord a place to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The coat of arms consisted of five torches representing the five Yugoslav nations recognised by the Communists and AVNOJ: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Montenegrins. For Čišić, if each of these nations had been granted its own national republic, then the same was due to the Bosnians: 'From the above-mentioned, it follows logically that the Bosnian-Herzegovinian federated unit can rest on the principle: Bosnia for the Bosnians.' To symbolise this, he proposed that 'in the third clause, in the fourth clause of that sentence, make the change: instead of five, "six torches placed at an angle..."', and so forth, so that the right be in fact respected'. Čišić did not once mention the word 'Muslim' in his text, instead arguing for the recognition of a Bosnian nationality embracing all religious communities: 'Above all, it is difficult to believe that there is a single true Bosnian to whom it would be objectionable to be called by that name, and if anyone still wants to be called something different, may he be forgiven.'<sup>121</sup> In a second appeal to the Minister for the Constituent Assembly on 16 January, Čišić repeated his arguments about Bosnian particularity, but this time specifically attacked the concept of a 'Muslim' national denomination as a 'terrible humiliation' for nationally conscious Bosnians. The Ministry for the Constituent Assembly duly recorded Čišić's demand in its list of suggested amendments to the constitution, though distilling it simply to the demand: 'in the third clause, in the fourth clause of that sentence, make the change: instead of five, "six torches placed at an angle..."', and so forth'.<sup>122</sup>

Following an extensive discussion with Tito over the issue, however, Milovan Đilas, as Deputy Minister for the Constituent Assembly, rejected Čišić's request in his discussion before the Assembly of 17 January, on the subject of proposed amendments. Referring somewhat contemptuously to 'the proposal of a Muslim, that a sixth torch should be added to our state coat of arms', Đilas misrepresented it as 'motivated by the idea, that the Muslims are a separate nation; that the Muslims have approved the constitution in all its particularities, but that they are dissatisfied by the fact that a sixth torch has not been added to the state coat of arms as a symbol of Muslim nationhood!' This misrepresentation of Čišić's demand, as being for the recognition of Muslim rather than Bosnian nationhood, may have stemmed from the fact that leading Communists such as Tito and Kardelj (though not Đilas) were sympathetic to the idea of a Muslim nationality—which dovetailed with their policy of national equality and brotherhood—but not to the idea of Bosnian nationhood. The latter was objectionable to most nationally conscious Bosnian Serbs and Croats and clashed with the principle of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a multinational homeland of three peoples. The idea of Muslim nationhood could be discussed; the idea of Bosnian nationhood could not be.

In his rejection of Čišić's proposal, Đilas did not reject the idea of Muslim nationhood in principle, but dissembled, arguing that:

parliament cannot discuss the question of whether the Muslims are a national group or not, because at the end of the day, whether something is a national group or particularity

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does not depend on the People's Parliament, for it is the way it is. This is a theoretical question in which people can argue one way or the other, but in no case can it be resolved by a decree.

Đilas argued that if the proposal had suggested adding a sixth torch to represent the six units of the federation, then it could be a subject for discussion, 'but since we are holding the viewpoint, that every nation is to receive its torch, then in every case there should be only five torches'. Đilas hastened to add that 'I do not intend to negate the particular line among the Muslims, that exists today'.<sup>123</sup> Čišić remained unreconciled to the Yugoslav coat of arms of five torches: the records of the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly note that in the vote in the Assembly's upper chamber—the Assembly of Peoples representing the federal units—a single vote was cast against Clause 3 of the draft constitution that defined the Federal coat of arms.<sup>124</sup>

Čišić's demand for a sixth torch was seconded by Muhamed Hadžijahić, a young scholar from Sarajevo. Hadžijahić had already campaigned on behalf of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Muslims with a text written in 1944 in which he defended the Muslims from charges that they had collaborated with the Axis and persecuted Serbs and highlighted instead their opposition to the Ustashas and their anti-Serb policies. Hadžijahić argued at that time that 'Bosnia-Herzegovina is a unified geographic whole' whose 'population is unusually mixed in religious terms, so that it cannot be joined either to the Serb or to the Croat unit'. On the contrary: 'Democratic principles demand that Bosnian particularity be preserved, something which the majority of the population of Bosnia has always favoured.' This text was apparently written for the Allied leaders and public, though it is unclear precisely which and whether the text was ever sent or received any reply. Nor is it clear whether Hadžijahić wrote this out of apprehension over how genuine the Partisans' commitment to Bosnian autonomy really was, out of a wish to ingratiate himself with them, or even at their behest. Certainly, he argued for the international importance of respecting Bosnian unity and autonomy: 'International political reasons likewise demand the establishment of a separate Bosnian unit, in order that the Muslims in Bosnia be satisfied, so that the sympathy of the remainder of the Islamic world be won for the Great Powers, who will have influence on Yugoslav politics.'<sup>125</sup>

Whatever Hadžijahić's precise political allegiances, in the public debate over the draft Yugoslav constitution he wrote to several leading Communists and the General Council of Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, claiming that 'the Muslim masses are not satisfied by the state coat of arms showing only five torches as the symbols of the five nations', and demanding that 'to the coat of arms be added also a sixth torch, which will formally show that the Muslims are a subject equal to their brother Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians and Muslims...'<sup>126</sup> Unlike Čišić, therefore, Hadžijahić demanded the sixth torch in order to represent a Muslim rather than a Bosnian nationality; their interventions in the constitutional debate were therefore independent of one another and indicative of the different ways in which nationally conscious Bosnian Muslims reacted to the draft constitution.

The question of Muslim nationhood was also raised by activists at the local level. At a conference of employees of the law courts in Sarajevo on 12 December 1946 held to discuss the draft Bosnian constitution a certain 'Comrade Kapiđić'

asked 'why, in the Constitution, the Muslims are not treated as a nation?' The official speaker, Mihailo Ilić, responded:

the Muslims, on account of their dispersal across the territory on which they live and various events in their history, as well as not possessing the psychological constitution (their own culture), have not created their own nationality, but some feel themselves to be Serbs and others Croats, something that depended on the influence of those nationalities on them, while one part has not declared itself nationally at all.<sup>127</sup>

This represented a much more definite repudiation of the idea and principle of a Muslim nationality than Đilas had been able to make, despite his similar feelings on the subject—an indication of the divisions in the central Communist leadership over the subject and the caution with which it approached the Muslim population. For his part, Kapidžić's intervention may be indicative of the discontent among Muslim activists at the failure of the Yugoslav constitutional system to recognise their nationhood.

### *The Zulfikarpašić affair*

The Partisan movement had been genuinely federal in organisation and character, with the movement in each Yugoslav land possessing real autonomy from the centre. Immediately after the war the republics continued to enjoy very real self-rule, to the point where they challenged the authority of the Federal centre. In this period the Federal authorities issued several complaints concerning the tendency of the republics to take legislative or financial steps that were beyond their jurisdiction or without consulting the Federal organs.<sup>128</sup> The Federal government felt compelled to warn the republican governments on 5 September 1945: 'The Federal ministry complains that certain ministries of the Federated governments do not always respond to its directives; they do not send on time, or do not send at all, requested information, reports of their work, etc.'<sup>129</sup> Bosnia was apparently less guilty in this respect than most other Federal units; aside from Macedonia, it was the only federal unit not specifically criticised in a subsequent Federal government directive sent on 14 September—those criticised included Vojvodina and Kosovo-Metohija as well as the other four republics.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the Federal government critique appears to have been a response in part to the Bosnian government's unauthorised sending of delegations to foreign countries for reasons of purely Bosnian economic interest. The Bosnian Communists spoke of Bosnian national-liberation and sovereignty and for at least some among the leadership this was not mere rhetoric. On at least one occasion, in the last months of the war high-ranking Bosnian Communists clashed with the Federal Yugoslav authorities in their efforts to protect such Bosnian economic interests, as they saw them.

According to Adil Zulfikarpašić, who was at the time Bosnian Assistant Minister for Trade and Supply and a candidate for the Provincial Committee of the KPJ, the incident arose from the efforts of the Yugoslav authorities to reclaim property pillaged by the occupying forces. Following the capitulation of Bulgaria in September 1944 the Bulgarian Army switched sides and carried out military operations against the retreating Germans, advancing against them all the way to

Slovenia and Austria. Following the end of the war, the Bulgarians turned over to the Yugoslavs a portion of the military booty they had captured from the Germans, depositing it in Zagreb. A conference was then held in Zagreb at which representatives of the different Yugoslav republics negotiated a division of the spoils received from the Bulgarians. Zulfikarpašić claims that the entire booty was sent to Serbia to be divided up but that Bosnia-Herzegovina never received its share.

Following this Pucar was determined that Bosnia-Herzegovina would not be similarly cheated out of its share of Yugoslav goods then held in Italy—these included confiscated Bosnian Jewish property and trade items owed by Italian firms to Bosnian purchasers. Already in March ZAVNOBiH had sent a representative, Augustin Papić, to Italy to look after its interests. Now, in June or July, Pucar sent a secret mission to Italy under Zulfikarpašić's leadership to reclaim Bosnia-Herzegovina's property preemptively, with Zulfikarpašić allegedly travelling to a sanatorium for health reasons. Zulfikarpašić claims he was able to arrange the transport of a couple of shiploads of goods from Italy to Bosnia via Croatia, some of which were not rightfully Bosnian, including some that belonged to Romania.<sup>131</sup>

However, Yugoslav Federal representatives arrived at the scene and uncovered the deception, at which point Zulfikarpašić admitted that his goal had been to prevent a repeat of the fiasco over the Bulgarian booty. The Presidency of the Yugoslav Council of Ministers reported this to the Presidency of the People's Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina on 18 July 1945.<sup>132</sup> The Bosnian government, under Čolaković, immediately wrote to the Bosnian Ministry of Trade and Supply to demand an explanation. The Ministry of Trade and Supply replied on 10 August stating honestly that it had had no hand in either Papić's or Zulfikarpašić's mission to Italy. The first, it claimed, had been sent by ZAVNOBiH and was equivalent to similar missions sent by other federal units at the time and was therefore above board. By contrast, the Ministry stated its opinion that Zulfikarpašić had been sent to Italy by the Yugoslav Ministry of Health for medical treatment and that he had not been acting as its trade representative. This response was then conveyed by the Bosnian government back to the Yugoslav Council of Ministers on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile, in his interrogation on 4 August, Zulfikarpašić now claimed that he had travelled to Italy solely for medical reasons.<sup>133</sup>

This affair led Tito personally to ban the republican authorities from sending their delegations abroad without the prior approval of the Yugoslav Council of Ministers and to issue strict regulations to ensure that such delegations had to be under close Federal supervision.<sup>134</sup> According to Zulfikarpašić's later testimony, Pucar had been forced to repudiate him and deny his and the Bosnian leadership's involvement in the mission. This led to Zulfikarpašić's fall from grace in the Communist leadership and his flight from Yugoslavia into a half century of exile.<sup>135</sup> Yet his behaviour had not been out of the ordinary: even after this affair, other Yugoslav republics and lower organs of government continued to send their delegates abroad without authorisation from the Federal leadership. Those that did this included Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, but not, it appears, Bosnia, which may have feared committing a second transgression.<sup>136</sup> Yet the Zulfikarpašić affair was testimony that some in the Bosnian leadership took talk of Bosnian self-determination at face value.

*Women as the vanguard*

The weakness of the Communists' base of popular support increased the importance to them of the female half of the population; traditionally excluded from mainstream politics, women were an untapped constituency that the KPJ was ideally placed to exploit. On behalf of the Central Committee, Aleksandar Ranković wrote to the Provincial Committee to remind it of this:

With the end of the war, the activity of women must not and cannot end. On the contrary, that activity must develop further and be rejuvenated with new tasks: the safeguarding and further development of the achievements of the People's Liberation Struggle and the achievement of the rights of women—those rights are part of the achievements of the People's Liberation Struggle; and the solution of the broad tasks of a political, economic and social character in the building of our country.

In this context, he went on, 'Party organisations must comprehend work among women in the villages as one of the most important paths for the recruitment of the villages.' Ranković noted that the activity of the Antifascist Front of Women across Yugoslavia was not at the level it should be; that the political mobilisation of women was not sufficiently understood among the population; and that women had not participated sufficiently in the elections. He called upon Communists to devote greater effort to building the Antifascist Front of Women and promoting its activities, but as part of the overall activities of the People's Front, not as a narrowly feminist enterprise cut off from the rest of the movement.<sup>137</sup>

Pucar, as secretary of the KPJ Provincial Committee for Bosnia-Herzegovina, sent a directive at this time to all local committees of the KPJ in Bosnia along similar lines; he stressed in particular the need to increase activity among Croat women so as to counteract the influence of the Catholic Church and the need to form women's bodies in the Prosvjeta, Napredak and Preporod cultural societies as a means of reaching women whom the Antifascist Front of Women had up to that point failed to reach. Pucar nevertheless evaluated on this occasion that the People's Front's influence was weak 'over part of the Serb women in the towns and the greater part of the Croat women in the towns and villages, as well as over one smaller part of the Muslim women...', suggesting that it was particularly among the Muslim women, perceived to be traditionally the most politically marginalised section of the Bosnian population, that the regime's message had found the greatest resonance.<sup>138</sup>

In the run-up to the elections for the Constituent Assembly, the Antifascist Front of Women held election rallies across Bosnia in a sustained effort to mobilise women to vote for the government, involving fiery speeches hailing the equality of the sexes and the sisterhood of Muslim, Serb and Croat women. The Communists praised the role of women in the NOP. Hasan Brkić's text in the government's election propaganda almanac *Bosnian and Herzegovinian Women Vote for Tito* was characteristic: 'Without exaggeration, it can be said that without the active participation of women on the front, and without their sacrifice in carrying out their duty in the rear', he wrote, 'we would not have won'.<sup>139</sup> The campaign apparently had some success. The Okrug Committee of the KPJ for Sarajevo likewise confirmed in November 1945 that its *orkug* Antifascist Front of Women

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conference of the previous month 'had a repercussion in particular among Muslim women', who were 'most massively entering the A[ntifascist] F[ront of] W[omen], in the town as in the village'. Serb women, too, were similarly joining the Anti-fascist Front of Women en masse in most places, while it was the Croat women, under the influence of the Catholic clergy, who were proving most difficult to recruit.<sup>140</sup> The KPJ Okrug Committee for Tuzla reported in the same month on the important role that Muslim women had played in Tuzla in mobilising for the elections on behalf of the People's Front:

Muslims turned out massively for the election, as was expected. A particularly live interest in the election was felt among Muslim women, who were the carriers and movers of political activity. This political transformation on the part of Muslim women can serve as the base for the political reorientation of the Muslims.<sup>141</sup>

At the KPJ conference for the Kladanj District on 30 December 1945 it was noted by the keynote speaker:

In Kladanj, women are fairly encompassed and more politically interested in all events and problems than are the men themselves. Women are awakening from their state of being



Image 6: 'Bosnian and Herzegovinian women vote for Tito'—a People's Front pamphlet from 1945.

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hidebound, in which they have always lived, and our rallies and conferences are always most heavily attended by women. This is the case in almost all the villages of our district.<sup>142</sup>

On 12 March 1946 the Federal parliament passed a law on marriages guaranteeing legal equality between husbands and wives.<sup>143</sup> By the end of 1946 20 per cent of KPJ members in Bosnia were women.<sup>144</sup>

The mobilisation of women undoubtedly helped broaden the regime's basis of support but in a manner that directly threatened the values of the conservative Muslim elite. In his text in the *Annual of the 16<sup>th</sup> Muslim Brigade*, Tanović lauded the liberation of Muslim women:

The Muslim girl participating in the struggle takes the veil from her eyes and serenely looks into the future. Until yesterday under the veil, the Muslim woman today steps with gun in hand into the P[eople's] L[iberation] Army. Conscious of her position, she becomes a fighter, heroine, nurse, cultural and political worker.<sup>145</sup>

Hasan Brkić, in his text in *Bosnian and Hercegovinian Women Vote for Tito*, was more forthright still:

I must in particular say something about the Muslim woman. Her past is full of suffering, degradation and subordination. The chance was never offered to her to display those wonderful characteristics that she carried, deeply hidden, in her noble, rich spirit. She worked, gave birth and raised her children. Downtrodden and withdrawn into herself, she performed all this with the definite feeling that this could not be otherwise, and she most frequently reconciled herself to it. But today the Muslim woman has risen to her feet, and as if after a long and difficult dream, she feels born again. With unbelievable interest, will and love she participates in public life. She is today a vigilant guardian of our achievements, and with justice sees in them her salvation and her future.<sup>146</sup>

This policy of emancipation undoubtedly provided the Partisans and, following them, the People's Government with a significant pool of support, but it also helped catalyse the conservative Muslim reaction that gathered pace in the months that followed. The KPJ Okrug Committee for Tuzla reported on 19 November 1945 that in the elections for the Constituent Assembly in the Gradačac district, Muslim reactionaries mobilised in opposition to the emancipation of women, arguing that the Communists planned to 'uncover all women, but that [Muslim reactionary mobilisation] did not have any kind of success. On the contrary, women turned out 100 per cent for the election'.<sup>147</sup>

### *Thermidor of the Muslims*

A genuine revolution, and the outburst of spontaneity and positive energy that it brings, is generally followed by a backlash, during which this outburst is curbed. In the case of Communist-ruled Yugoslavia, the backlash began as the new regime consolidated itself, whereupon it increasingly felt less need to tolerate the pluralistic elements inherited from the People's Liberation Front. The regime's hand was strengthened by the capture of Draža Mihailović in March 1946 and his trial and execution in June and July. The conflict with Stepinac was resolved in the autumn of 1946 by his arrest and trial, which was followed in the spring of 1947 by the arrest and trial of Dragoljub Jovanović of the League of Farmers and Franjo Gazi



of the HSS. At the same time, events at the international level steadily increased the regime's sense of insecurity. The escalating hostility between Yugoslavia and the Western Allies revolving around the issues of Trieste and the Greek Civil War was followed by the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Communist Information Bureau on 28 June 1948, marking the outbreak of open conflict with the Soviet bloc. Increasing foreign threats led to further repression at home. Communist activists in this period, under siege from hostile political elements and large sections of the population, gave vent to more sectarian political sentiments than they had during the war, directed against 'kulaks' and 'non-proletarian' or 'petty-bourgeois' elements. Communist hostility was directed not only against reactionaries but against Social Democrats, whose influence over wide sections of the working class was feared and resented. But even the Party itself was stretched to breaking point by its need to fulfil all the tasks that the conquest of power had bequeathed to it. There were too few Communists to fill the required posts in the administration; consequently, even the most unqualified Communists had to be appointed to such posts, while the influx of new members into the Party included those considered politically unreliable.<sup>148</sup>

Meanwhile the foundations of a new Bosnian society were laid by a series of radical social and economic reforms passed by the Yugoslav regime. In 1945 agrarian reform restricted the size of private holdings to between 35 and 45 hectares of arable land and confiscated about 1.5 million hectares, of which about half was distributed to landless peasants—primarily Partisan veterans—and half organised in state and collective farms. By December 1946 approximately 80 per cent of Yugoslav industry had been nationalised; in that month, a Nationalisation Law was passed to enable the nationalisation of industries 'of national importance': transport, banking and the wholesale trade. A second Nationalisation Law was passed in April 1948 covering the retail trade, insurance companies and the health service. The Nationalisation Laws essentially provided *post-facto* justification for measures already taken.<sup>149</sup> Meanwhile, KPJ membership expanded apace as the one-party state was consolidated: having stood at a membership of 830 at the time of the Axis invasion in April 1941 and 12,275 in November 1945, membership rose to 28,763 in November 1947 and 53,031 at the time of the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1948.<sup>150</sup>

The dissolution of the traditional socio-economic order in Bosnia was, of course, part and parcel of the consolidation of Communist rule. The law on agrarian reform passed by the Bosnian parliament on 5 January 1946 was also a law on internal colonisation, which was then built upon by a further decree on the execution of internal colonisation issued by the Bosnian government on 1 March. This was not just a matter of Communist egalitarian principle, it also enabled the regime, through the agrarian colonists, to put down roots in areas where the indigenous population was reserved or hostile to it, while watering down the latter. Another act of modernisation was administrative: Bosnia-Herzegovina's organisation as seven *okrugs*, a modification of the traditional system of six *okrugs* that dated back to the Ottoman period, was overturned in January 1947, when the Bosnian parliament passed a law establishing a new system based on only four *okrugs*: the Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo and Tuzla *Okruzs*, with the city of Sarajevo forming a separate administrative entity in its own right.<sup>151</sup>

Ne laje šarov sela radi . . .

Propali političanti i profiteri, u  
srčin krajevima naše Republike, na-  
stoje da muslimanska djeca idu u  
mektebe, mjesto u škole.



Image 7: ‘Don’t send the children to that infidel school, but to a mekteb, poor wretches ... The faith is in danger!’ ‘Hey, your skullduggery is no longer working! And it is not the faith that is in danger, gentlemen, but your indolence at the expense of the working people!’ A cartoon in *Oslobodenje*, 14 July 1946.

Ne laje šarov sela radi . . .

Jedna grupa sarajevskih re-  
akcionera proturala je laži kako  
je danas vjera ugrožena, dok je  
u isto vrijeme skrivajući dža-  
miju, krijući u njoj svoju crno-  
berzijašku robu.



Image 8: ‘For God’s sake, brothers, the faith is in danger!’ This cartoon from *Oslobodenje*, 8 September 1946, shows conservative Muslims hoarding black-market goods in a mosque.

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Rodoljub Čolaković, Prime Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, gave expression to the new, more aggressive, more radical Communist course at a meeting of the Bosnian Communist leadership held in Sarajevo on 5 August 1946. 'Since our latest political meeting, which was last summer, up to today, the political situation in Yugoslavia has developed on the basis of an intensifying of the class struggle', began Čolaković:

The political positions are in our hands, but the links of our bourgeoisie and international imperialism are still extremely strong. If we look at the dealings today of various bourgeois groups, we see that this is the organised force of the counter-revolution. Thus, in our country the bourgeoisie as a class is not expropriated.

Consequently: 'The bourgeoisie has gathered and has begun to act on the basis of a unified plan in the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina. That is what is new, which our Party must conclude in the contemporary political reality of our republic.' This newly perceived bourgeois enemy, according to Čolaković, was embodied, first, in the opposition bloc represented above all in the section of the HSS headed by Juraj Šutej, allied to certain non-Croat political elements represented most prominently by Dragoljub Jovanović of the League of Farmers. 'Thus', concluded Čolaković, 'the tendency for our bourgeoisie to affirm itself through a peasant movement can be seen, so that their struggle for power is led under the cloak of a struggle for peasant rights which the Communist Party is threatening'. Čolaković linked this faction to the émigré King Petar.

'So far as the Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina are concerned', said Čolaković, 'it is necessary to indicate the activities of the Catholic clergy which is linked to its centre: to the Vatican'. He named the 'Muslim reactionaries' as the second reactionary force in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

Its leader is Šefkija Behmen, and the most prominent people around him are the Šahinagić brothers, as well as the high functionaries of the I[sLAMic] R[eligious] C[ommunity]. Their activity is felt across the whole of B[osnia]-H[erzegovina], and that not coincidentally; rather, they act on the basis of a definite plan. They mobilise the masses over religious questions such as the questions of the *mektebs*, *madrasahs*, the position of the clergy, the teaching of religious education in schools, etc... Behind these reactionary groups stand our *čaršija* in whose name speaks these reactionaries. In all our *kasabas* there is a definite circle of Muslims from the *čaršija* who are our enemies.

This group was, according to Čolaković, active not only outside the People's Front but also within it, that is, among the ranks of those Muslims who had supported the NOP; here Čolaković singled out for mention the Communists' former collaborator Hamdija Čemerlić, who had gone over to the Partisans at the time of the first liberation of Tuzla and become a member of the presidency of ZAVNOBiH. By contrast with the Croat and Muslim reactionaries, Čolaković claimed that the Serb reactionaries in Bosnia did not have a definite leadership. He nevertheless specified that Serb reactionaries were concentrated above all in the ranks of returning refugees, particularly Orthodox priests who had resided in Serbia during the war and who were headed by Bishop Nektarije.

Faced with this organised, 'bourgeois' enemy from the ranks of all Bosnia's nationalities, Čolaković raised the banner of class warfare: 'Victorious in our coun-

try, the proletariat has arrived at the position of hegemon; that is, in alliance with the peasantry it wages its class politics which means death for the bourgeoisie.' Čolaković reminded his audience: 'We must never forget that we are the Party of the revolution and that we are the political leadership of the masses.' The second stage of the revolution, after the successful People's Liberation Struggle against the occupiers and their collaborators, would involve a struggle against the bourgeoisie, including those who had fought on the Partisan side in the war:

Many patriots who gathered around us during the war are now vacillating. They do not like our democracy; it is going too quickly forward. Today, when a course is being led openly toward socialism, their spirits vacillate and they declare against us. We shall not look upon such people through our fingers, but we must openly unmask them. We shall strengthen the Front by purging it of people who are vacillating and going over to the enemy, and by recruiting those who want to and are able to go with us.

The Party leadership had to wake up to the struggle and play the role of leader: 'The enemy is much more determined, more ingenious; it reacts to every event and across the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina carried out actions against us.' Čolaković warned his comrades: 'You are aware that we are surrounded by enemy classes that penetrate with their influence into the Party. Because of this, it is important to strengthen discipline in the Party and exercise more control over the personal lives and authority of our comrades.'<sup>152</sup>

The Communist regime's determination to establish a fully secular state brought it increasingly into conflict with one section of Muslim opinion. This fed the residual resistance to the new regime that had festered since the liberation of the country. In the Bihać region, where the disparity between the readiness of conservative Muslims to support the Partisans and their actual receptivity to the ideals championed by the Communists had been greatest, the KPJ's Okrug Committee reported in August 1945 that:

the reaction has been attempting to establish its base in the People's Councils and to link up with councillors who entered the councils before liberation and who were not oriented toward us, whom we must purge from the councils without delay. Such elements support the groups of the Green Forces and provide them with intelligence; through their errors in work, they carry out open sabotage which they justify on the grounds of ignorance of their work, thereby compromising our government among the people.

In addition: 'The trained people employed in our apparatus of government are in the majority from the old state apparatus, and they bring with them into our apparatus the spirit of slowness and bureaucratism.' And worse:

The *okrug* court and the district court in Bihać still do not have a court secretary. The secretary who was sent to the *okrug* court has been arrested by the D[e]partment for the P[rotection of the] P[eople] and is under investigation on account of his participation in an Ustasha court-martial.

As for the organs of public order:

The People's Militia is extremely weak. It lacks the required number of militiamen. The role of the militia is not properly grasped by the military commands and into it are sent

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illiterate people, even those who had been in the Chetniks and Home Guard. We have cases at Cazin where the militiamen meet with the Green Forces and, instead of shooting at them, surrender their weapons to them without firing a shot.<sup>153</sup>

Such an environment was conducive to the rise of a Muslim reaction, and in October 1945 a petition circulated by members of the Muslim clergy in Cazin demanded the introduction of compulsory religious education in all schools; the exemption of *vakif* property from the agrarian reforms; and the permission for all sharia courts to carry out polygamous marriages involving a Muslim man and a second bride.<sup>154</sup>

Elections to the Islamic Religious Community in November were won by anti-Communists, indicating the institution's intention to retain autonomy from the regime. During the deliberations of the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly in January 1946 the Muslim delegates Zaim Šarac and Hasan Rebac strongly criticised the demands of the Ulema Medžlis, or High Islamic Council, for the retention of sharia law's jurisdiction over family affairs and marriage, the retention of religious education and the exclusion of women from military service. Šarac rejected the supremacy of the Ulema Medžlis over religious affairs, claiming that this supremacy rightly belonged to the Council of Vakifs, which, he claimed, had accepted the principle of the separation of church and state. Sharia law did not recognise the equality of women with men, said Šarac, yet even such rights as it did accord women had not been properly enforced by the Islamic religious establishment; thus, in insisting on the suppression of polygamy and in upholding women's equality within marriage, the government was merely insisting on rules that were in accordance with a strict interpretation of sharia law.<sup>155</sup> That Šarac presented the regime's religious reforms as representing the will of the Muslim people was not entirely insincere, since one section of the Muslim elite was undoubtedly sincere in its support of the secularist reforms. Yet however inevitable and justifiable the reforms may have been, given the Communists' insistence on the equality of the sexes, it was equally inevitable that they accelerated the show-down with the more conservative elements of the Muslim elite, thereby narrowing the regime's basis of support and, eventually, resulting in the curtailment of Muslim national rights, even as Muslim women's rights were upheld.

As the regime's conflict with the Islamic establishment escalated the former continued to pose as the defender of the Islamic community's security and liberty and remind Muslims of what the alternative had been. In a speech to a conference of Muslims in Sarajevo in this period Hasan Brkić complained about a member of the Ulema Medžlis who had publicly condemned the secular character of the new order:

Recently, a ceremony was held—the opening of a mosque in Fojnica that had been destroyed and burned along with thousands of Muslim and Croat houses by the Chetniks of Draža Mihailović. Today, the people has freely erected the mosque. Instead of the person who came from Sarajevo saying what it would have meant if the people who had burned the mosque had won, he omitted to say a single word about our state, about the position of the Muslims within it, but he did not forget to set forth the thesis that every person who does not believe has no moral quality either in public or in private life, darkly alluding thus that our state is basically a state of non-believers and that as such it cannot last.<sup>156</sup>

The regime had rescued the Muslims from the Chetnik threat and safeguarded their mosques and their freedom of worship, but it would not depart from the principle of a secular state.

On 5 March 1946 sharia courts were abolished in Bosnia and their competencies transferred to the national courts.<sup>157</sup> In December several high officials of the Vakif Council of the Islamic Religious Community, including director Hazim Muftić and assistant director Mustafa Islamović, were put on trial, accused of systematically embezzling the money of the poorer buyers of *vakif* land.<sup>158</sup> In January 1947 Mehmed Sahinagić, an official of the Islamic Religious Community, was put on trial for his alleged pro-Ustasha activities in Sarajevo. This was followed by the regime's suspension of funding for the Islamic Religious Community and of its right to collect funds voluntarily from the Muslim community. The Islamic Religious Community was thereby compelled to reach an accord with the regime in August 1947, accepting the required reforms and electing leaders ready to go along with them. The institution was to be an autonomous organisation representing the Muslim population of Yugoslavia, with a Supreme Vakif Council made up of representatives from the four Vakif Councils of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Although the Vakif Councils of each were to be elected by the direct and secret vote of the Muslim population, the local committees were to be elected by open voting, while the district committees were to be appointed by the Vakif Councils. In return, the government restored state funding for the Community.<sup>159</sup> According to the new constitution of the Islamic Religious Community promulgated on 26 August: 'The goal of the Islamic Religious Community is to protect and develop religious life among the adherents of Islam.' The Islamic Religious Community was institutionalised within the new Yugoslav order: 'The Islamic Religious Community governs itself according to the tenets of Islam, according to the rules of this Constitution and other tenets issued on the basis of the Constitution, within the bounds of the Constitution of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia.'<sup>160</sup>

The new Reis ul-Ulema, Ibrahim Fejić, who came to power following the Islamic Religious Community's accord with the regime, wrote an open letter to Tito that was published in the regime newspaper *Borba*, pledging his support for the new order:

These days, the foreign reactionary press and public are frantically defaming our state, claiming that in the new Yugoslavia there is no freedom of religion or conscience. The members of the Islamic Religious Community on this occasion, through us, strongly condemn all these calumnies, for they are vulgar fabrications devoid of any foundation... We have never in these parts, in terms of practising Islam and performing religious services, enjoyed so much freedom as we enjoy in this, our new state.<sup>161</sup>

The subduing of the Islamic establishment went hand in hand with the suppression of Muslim national bodies: the General Council of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina was abolished in the same year. From 1946 the Muslim cultural society Preporod, along with its Serb, Croat and Jewish equivalents Prosvjeta, Napredak and Sloboda, were subjected to increasing control by the People's Front, which imposed upon them a forced coordination of activities as a prelude to their envisaged merger. At the meeting of the Bosnian Communist leadership on 5



August Uglješa Danilović identified the local branches of the cultural societies as potential organs of popular opposition to the regime; he therefore stressed the need to prevent the formation of such branches at the village level, also to prevent the formation of youth or women's sections of the cultural societies that might rival the Communist-controlled youth and women's organisations.<sup>162</sup> The assets of the societies were confiscated during 1947 and on 1 April 1948 the Union of Cultural-Educational and Artistic Societies was formed, to which the four cultural societies were forced to affiliate. In April 1949 the Union of Cultural-Educational and Artistic Societies formally absorbed the four cultural societies, which thereby ceased to exist.<sup>163</sup> There was nevertheless a degree of continuity between the new regime cultural organisation and its independent predecessors; the President of the Union of Cultural-Educational and Artistic Societies was Mladen Čaldarović, the Communist son of the former Napredak President Vladimir Čaldarović, though he too subsequently fell foul of Tito and was dismissed within a few years. In this period the use of the capital 'M' in the word 'Muslim' in official publications was phased out so that the Muslims were typographically demoted to the status of a religious community.

The Antifascist Front of Women launched a campaign in 1947 to encourage women to abandon the veil. Reis Fejić endorsed the campaign against the veil in his inaugural address on 12 September: 'One valuable legacy of the liberation war of our peoples is the proclamation of women's equality', he stated; '[b]ut unfortunately women cannot achieve the full expression of that equality, as they are inhibited by wearing the veil and gown'. On 1 November 1947 the Islamic Religious Community informed the Muslim population that 'the veiling of women is not required by religious code. Muslim women, as regards religion, are free to walk about unveiled and tend to their affairs.' Nevertheless, the campaign had only limited success: 95 per cent of Sarajevo's Muslim women had abandoned the veil by late 1950, but fewer than 50 per cent had done so in other towns in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>164</sup> On 29 September 1950 the Presidium of the People's Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina passed a law outlawing the wearing by women of Islamic dress—the veil and the *burkha*—with penalties of heavy fines and forced labour.<sup>165</sup> The *mektebs*, or Islamic primary schools, were closed down in the same year and the teaching of children in mosques was made a criminal offence.

The marginalisation of the Muslims was reflected in their representation in KPJ bodies. In December 1946 69.1 per cent of the membership of the KPJ in Bosnia was Serb, 20.3 per cent was Muslim and 8.5 per cent was Croat. The low proportion of Muslims may have been partly due to the fact that some Muslims declared themselves to be Serbs or Croats, but this was itself evidence of the national discrimination with which the Muslims, as an unrecognised nation, were faced. Thanks to heightened Communist efforts to increase the proportion of non-Serbs in the Bosnian Party organisation, in 1948 the latter was 62.4 per cent Serb, 24.3 per cent Muslim and 11.5 per cent Croat.<sup>166</sup> In February 1947 there were 2,339 members of the KPJ in Sarajevo, of whom 1,278 were Serbs, 560 Muslims and 269 Croats.<sup>167</sup> At the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the KPJ, held on 21–28 July 1948, the national breakdown of the delegates was as follows: 1,162 Serbs, 456 Croats, 209 Slovenes, 130 Macedonians, 237 Montenegrins, 59 Albanians and only 32 Muslims, with smaller numbers of other national groups.<sup>168</sup> Paradoxically, however, it was at the formal founding of the Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina—the



culminating act in Bosnia-Herzegovina's achievement of equality with other members of the Yugoslav federation—that the seal was set on the marginalisation of the Muslims. The decision to establish a Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as a Communist Party of Montenegro, was taken by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KPJ at its session of 16 June 1945.<sup>169</sup> However, the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina took place only on 1–5 November 1948, a month after the founding of the Communist Party of Montenegro and several years after the founding of the equivalent parties of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and in a very different political environment. The 679 delegates comprised 432 Serbs, 141 Muslims, eighty-five Croats, seven Jews, four Montenegrins, one Slovene, one delegate who described himself as a 'Muslim Serb' and eight for whom no national affiliation was given.<sup>170</sup>

The founding congress of the Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina took place under the shadow of the conflict with the Soviet bloc and there was no longer the space for the euphoric spontaneity of the immediate post-war months. According to Mladen Čaldarović, a large section of the Bosnian Communist leadership, including Čolaković, Karabegović, Brkić and Mandžić, had vacillated over the Cominform Resolution, while Humo refused to commit himself either way; it was Pucar whose influence was decisive in swinging the Provincial Committee against it. Čaldarović claims that Bosnian Prime Minister Čolaković was inclined to favour the Resolution on account of his eclipse within the Bosnian Communist organisation by Pucar and even returned his Party card to Tito at this time, but that the latter, who knew how to manipulate him, handed it back.<sup>171</sup> Čolaković nevertheless had to perform self-criticism before the KPJ Central Committee.<sup>172</sup> In such circumstances, Communists were increasingly unready to behave as anything other than unquestioning Party loyalists.

The first speech of length at the founding congress was delivered by Pijade on behalf of the Central Committee of the KPJ, who cautioned the delegates that the establishment of six constituent Communist parties within the KPJ, corresponding to the six Yugoslav republics, 'does not mean that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia has thereby gained the character of some sort of federation of six Communist parties; that it has ceased to be a unified and centralised party'. The KPJ would, said Pijade, continue to be 'based on the principle of democratic centralism'. As a Communist theoretician, Pijade had a history of opposing the affirmation of the Muslims as a nation and Bosnia-Herzegovina as a republic, but he had shifted his position on these issues from the autumn of 1943 onward under the impact of the KPJ's own shift. Now, however, he reverted to his earlier position on the Muslims, arguing that in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

are living, inseparably intermingled, part of the Serb and part of the Croat nations, while the third part of the population is comprised of Muslims of Slavic origin, who adopted Islam and who define themselves by their religious identity, and in large part are not nationally determined. This fact, that there can be found in Europe today a population without national characteristics, is the result of that extreme backwardness and great stagnation, which characterises the constraints of Turkish feudalism.<sup>173</sup>

It was a sign of the times that not one Muslim Communist arose to challenge Pijade's demeaning depiction of the Muslim nation. When, at the underground 5<sup>th</sup>

Country Conference of the KPJ in 1940, Pijade and Đilas had negated the Muslim national identity in this manner, they had been resolutely challenged by the veteran Mostar Communist Mustafa Pašić, who subsequently died a hero's death in combat with the Chetniks. But things had changed by 1948. The official minutes of the congress record only that when Pijade finished his speech with the slogan 'Long live the great leader and teacher of the working people of Yugoslavia—Comrade Tito!', he was greeted by the delegates with 'Ecstatic, prolonged chanting: "Tito—C[entral] C[ommittee]—Tito CC!"'<sup>174</sup>

As the regime began to more closely supervise all aspects of Muslim public life and impose restrictions on the operation of Islamic schools and other Muslim cultural and religious institutions, so it was increasingly less willing to accommodate the religious and dietary needs of Muslim soldiers and students. Abuses occurred; thus on 18 February 1946 the Ulema Medžlis was moved to complain after the civilian authorities in the town of Nevesinje, in the heart of the traditionally most pro-Chetnik part of the country, had used the town's mosques to store grain.<sup>175</sup> All this inevitably created a backlash among sections of the Muslim population. This expressed itself in renewed support for the Young Muslims as a radical alternative to the Communists, one that was increasingly attractive to Muslim youth. The organisation, which had originated in 1939 in resistance to the policies of the pre-war Yugoslav regime and had survived the war in opposition to the Ustasha regime, now underwent a flowering.

If the accounts of surviving Young Muslim activists are to be believed, the Communists did not initially view the latter as an enemy equivalent to the Ustasas or Chetniks. It was only with the attempted Young Muslim putsch in Preporod that the regime's persecution of the movement began. As Alija Izetbegović recalls:

You see, not a single prosecution was carried out against us in 1945, at a time when all criminals and all collaborators with the occupiers were being arrested and tried. The first arrest of 'Young Muslims' was carried out on 1 March 1946 and was followed by others: one group in 1946; in 1947, a second and a third; in 1948, a fourth and a fifth; and then 1949.

Izetbegović recalls that the Communists allowed the Young Muslims to join Preporod when it was founded in 1945 in the belief that they could still be tamed for the regime; it was the Young Muslims' continued agitation on a Muslim national basis that persuaded the Communists to crush them.<sup>176</sup> For their part, the Young Muslims had mostly been mobilised into the Partisans during the last weeks of the war and many saw action against the Ustasas or Chetniks (Rušid Prguda, a Young Muslim and a Partisan wounded in the battle to liberate Sarajevo, would be among those arrested alongside Izetbegović by the Bosnian Communist regime in 1983; on this occasion, he was beaten so badly in prison that he died).<sup>177</sup> As the war drew to a close and in the immediate post-war months many Young Muslims joined the various organs of the People's Liberation Front, even the KPJ itself. It was only later that they increasingly began to feel oppressed. As former Young Muslim activist Ismet Serdarević recalls: 'In the army, we Muslims were allowed to fast, whosoever wished. We even went in the evenings to the mosque. Nobody spoke against us, let alone forbade us. The change took place after the

election organised by the new government. The attitude towards believers changed.<sup>178</sup> Several members of the organisation were killed by the security services in this period but a new generation of activists arose to replace them. On 1 March 1946 members of a group of Young Muslim conscripts in the Yugoslav Army, including Izetbegović, were arrested. They were subsequently tried before a military court and given prison terms, of which the longest was four years.

The Young Muslims who in the spring of 1946 came forward to fill the ranks of the arrested responded to the repression by switching to a conspiratorial political style, reminiscent of the Communists themselves in the pre-war period. A Young Muslim underground network emerged, linking cells in Sarajevo, Mostar, Zenica and other towns in East Bosnia and Hercegovina. In the autumn of 1946 an activist was sent to Zagreb University to seek recruits among the Muslim students there. Despite repeated arrests and trials of its activists, including the uncovering of the Mostar branch in mid 1948, the organisation, which described itself as an 'educating, fighting Islamic organisation', held a plenum in Sarajevo on 20–21 February 1949, at which steps were taken to tighten the underground organisation and engage in military training. Yet the organisation was then overwhelmed by police action by the regime's security service, the Office of State Security. Hundreds of Young Muslim activists were arrested in an action that blurred together with the larger, Yugoslav-wide police action against the so-called 'Ibeovci', or supporters of the Cominform Resolution denouncing the Titoist regime. In the trial of Young Muslim activists of 1–12 August 1949, four were sentenced to death and subsequently executed, and several others to prison terms of up to twenty years.<sup>179</sup> The Vakif Council of the Islamic Religious Community issued a resolution on 14 August supporting the regime's action against the 'terrorist organisation "Young Muslims"'.<sup>180</sup>

The harshness with which the Young Muslims were suppressed was an expression of the weakness and insecurity of the regime, something further demonstrated by the major peasant uprising that broke out on 6 May 1950 in the Cazinska Krajina and in the neighbouring Slunj region of Croatia. This uprising was a reaction to Titoist agricultural policy; led by former Partisans disillusioned with the character of the regime they had brought into being, it united Muslims, Serbs and Croats irrespective of nationality. But in the socially conservative region of Cazinska Krajina, where polygamy was still widely practised at the time of the uprising and where *hodjas* frequently warned the population of the danger that the new order posed to the faith, popular Muslim discontent with the regime's policy towards religion and women and with Serb domination of the region's security services may have catalysed the outbreak. Many former soldiers of Huska Miljković's militia, both those who had fought as Partisans and those who had supported the Ustashas and Green Forces, participated in the uprising. Ale Čović, the deputy commander of the uprising and its most senior Muslim leader, used his reputation as a prominent former collaborator of Miljković's to popularise the idea of the uprising among the Muslims of the region, though the supreme commander was his fellow Partisan veteran, the Bosnian Serb Milan Božić.<sup>181</sup> The uprising was easily repressed within a month and extremely harsh measures were taken against the local population of the region; 115 Cazinska Krajina families, of which four were Serb and the rest Muslim, amounting to a total of 777 people,

were deported from their homes and resettled elsewhere in the country. This may have been not simply in order to punish those who supported the rising but also to break the resistance of this traditionally autonomist region to the new order.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, the shock that the Cazinska Krajina uprising delivered to the regime helped ensure the subsequent moderation of agricultural policy, and from 1953 the system of socialised agriculture was largely dismantled; the uprising was, in this sense, Yugoslavia's Kronstadt. In the context of such massive social discontent bubbling beneath the surface, the fear with which the regime viewed a radical, organised opposition group such as the Young Muslims is readily understood.

The Young Muslims were, in many ways, heirs to the Communists of the pre-war period: a persecuted, radical sect, advocating an internationalist ideology. Emin Granov, a founding member of the Young Muslims, had written a pamphlet during the war, advocating: 'The political and economic unification and liberation of the Islamic world: When the situation is spiritually and politically ripe, there will come the spiritual and political liberation and unification of the Islamic world in a single enormous state or a union of states.'<sup>183</sup> This, of course, proved as much of a utopia as the goal of world Communism. Yet just as the Communists, a tiny and persecuted sect in the 1930s, would go on to lead the Bosnian liberation struggle against the Axis and their collaborators, so former Young Muslims and their fellow travellers, headed by Alija Izetbegović, would lead Bosnia-Herzegovina in its next revolutionary upheaval in the 1990s. The Bosnian Revolution that wound down in the 1940s would, half a century later, flare up in a new form.

## CONCLUSION

### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BOSNIAN REPUBLIC

The Communists began their resistance to the Axis occupiers and their collaborators in Yugoslavia in 1941 as a small, marginal political movement and ended it as the masters of the country. To successfully walk this path required them to pursue an intricate strategy and make numerous compromises. The all-Yugoslav Communist Party and Partisan movement provided an umbrella under which the Communist organisations in each Yugoslav land could organise an autonomous Partisan movement, subject to its own conditions. In Bosnia-Herzegovina this meant waging a Bosnian national-liberation movement that from the start spoke in Bosnian-patriotic terms and championed liberty for Bosnia. This movement culminated in the establishment of a Bosnian republic. Thus the Communists had to lead both the predominantly Serb and peasant armed resistance to the Ustasha regime in the countryside and the initially quieter but ultimately equally significant resistance among the predominantly Muslim and Croat urban population, NDH officials and soldiers and Bosnian elite. The first part of this dual strategy enabled the Communists to build up a powerful Bosnian Partisan army; the second enabled them to conquer the towns and NDH armed forces and bureaucracy from within. Both were ultimately necessary for the Communists to become masters of Bosnia and both were achieved.

Nevertheless, to realise the second of these strategies the Communists had to co-opt into the NOP sections of the Muslim autonomist resistance, which ran parallel to and overlapped with the latter. In this they were successful; the turning point came when a large section of the Muslim population of Bosnia went over to the NOP, particularly in the north-east and, to a lesser extent, in the centre of the country in the autumn of 1943—a success symbolised by the Partisan liberation of the city of Tuzla, involving the defection of its Home Guard garrison led by Sulejman Filipović. This mass influx of the Muslim population and, on a much smaller scale, the Croat population into the NOP added to the momentum of the Bosnian Partisan movement, which in November 1943 was crowned with the Central Committee decision to establish Bosnia as a member of the projected Yugoslav federation, equal in status to Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. This decision was cemented by the First Session of ZAVNOBiH and Second Session of AVNOJ, whose guarantee of Bosnia's status within Yugoslavia

then became an additional factor attracting Muslim support to the NOP. The influx of Muslims and Croats into the Bosnian Partisans, including many notables and former quisling soldiers and officials, did not overturn the Serb numerical preponderance within the movement, but did make it respectably multinational in fact as well as in principle. It furthermore ensured that the final Partisan conquest of the country, including its key towns, would be made through—rather than over the dead bodies of—the Muslim and Croat populations. These factors would make the establishment of the Bosnian republic—multinational, albeit with a Serb pre-eminence—a reality.

The co-option of one section of the Muslim autonomist movement, Muslim notables, HSS and Muslim and Croat quisling soldiery into the Partisan movement was, however, just one element in the NOP's expansion beyond the Communists' small base of dependable supporters to encompass a large section of the population. A large part of this new constituency was of dubious political character and uncertain or opportunistic loyalty to the NOP. It was furthermore inherently contradictory; it included alongside the new Muslim and Croat recruits a considerable section of the Serb population that had previously been pro-Chetnik. The Communists were faced with the difficulty of how to ensure their continued control over this large, diverse and contradictory movement and, eventually, of the entire Bosnian population. Their multifaceted propaganda upheld a model of Bosnian patriotism that they tried to make appealing to all Bosnians. As they set about consolidating their new Bosnian state following the liberation of the country, the construction of a Bosnian multinational patriotic model involved the adoption of a flag and coat of arms for the state that were heavy on Communist symbolism but virtually devoid of any Bosnian 'national' content. The Bosnian Partisans, under Communist leadership, constructed a Bosnian nation-state but without a Bosnian nation; Communism substituted for the non-existent Bosnian nationalism as the glue binding the state together.

The Bosnian Communists came out of World War II as a small element atop a large, diverse movement, itself in uneasy control of a still larger and more diverse population. They were faced with opposition and hostility from large sections of this population and former fellow-travellers from within this movement, over and above the opposition from the remnants of the Chetnik, Ustasha and Green Force movements. Above all, they faced organised opposition from the Catholic clergy and the ranks of the Muslim autonomists that had supported the NOP or had not actively stood against it, including the Young Muslims. The weakness of the Communists' base of support and the extent of the organised and passive popular opposition to them catalysed their establishment of an outright one-party dictatorship. As the Communists clamped down on their Muslim autonomist rivals, so the Muslims' religious and national rights were rolled back; once again they were increasingly treated simply as a religious minority rather than as a nationality; their name was again spelled with the small 'm'. This may have reflected also the Communists' increasingly exclusive reliance on their predominantly Serb and rural Partisan base, with all its prejudices. Paradoxically, as Muslim rights were curtailed the emancipation of women was accelerated, as women comprised a segment of the population previously untapped in politics therefore promising and reliable material for the new regime.

## CONCLUSION

The spectacular success of the Communists in establishing a new order under their rule, involving a federal Yugoslavia with Bosnia as a constituent republic, concealed the great weaknesses of this order, weaknesses that would become fully apparent only decades later. As the Communist regime liberalised from the second half of the 1960s onward, so the Bosnian Serbs increasingly lost their pre-eminence in Bosnia, while the federation loosened and the constituent republics won a greater degree of sovereignty from the federal centre. The Muslims were formally recognised as the sixth Yugoslav constituent nation in 1968 and went through a new national cultural renaissance, while the Bosnian Croats were emancipated from the stigma of having collaborated with the Ustashas. These factors laid the basis for a Bosnian Serb nationalist reaction against the Bosnian republic, one that found full expression following the fall of the Communist regime in 1990 and particularly as Bosnia headed towards independence in 1992. The key attributes of the Bosnian republic—multinational coexistence, the brotherhood and unity of Serbs, Croats and Muslims, modern industrial and urban civilisation, the emancipation of women—were assaulted as the Serb nationalists destroyed the republic. Just as the predominantly Serb and peasant Bosnian Partisans had occupied the cities and towns and colonised the central organs of government in Bosnia in the 1940s, so the Bosnian Serb nationalists led a Bosnian Serb secession from the republic in the 1990s. This involved, most symbolically, the abandonment of the Bosnian capital and Bosnian government institutions by the Serb members of the Bosnian presidency and parliament, in favour of relocation to the skiing resort of Pale. As they destroyed Bosnia, the Serb nationalists took the Bosnian Serb people, metaphorically, out of the republic and towns, back to the forests and mountains.

In this process of genocidal destruction, Muslims and Croats were killed or expelled and their religious and cultural artefacts destroyed, cities and towns were destroyed or depopulated and women were raped en masse, in the name of a rejectionist Serb nationalism underpinned by the escapist, traditionalist mythology of the old struggle against the Turks. Yet as the authority of the Bosnian state crumbled in the 1990s under the weight of the Serb-nationalist assault, it was not just Serb nationalists who rejected this state. Former Bosnian Croat Communist apparatchiks, with no natural claim to authority over their constituents, refashioned themselves as champions of the very nationalism they had spent the previous decades rejecting and denouncing and waged a separatist revolt of their own that paralleled that of the Serbs. The Muslim nationalists too, headed by the former Young Muslim Alija Izetbegović, reacted to the Serb and Croat separatist revolts by dismantling what was left of the multinational Bosnian republic from within; it was the Muslim-nationalist or Bosniak-nationalist Party of Democratic Action along with the new Bosnian army—almost exclusively Muslim by the war's end in 1995—rather than the state inherited from the Communists, that was the repository of Muslim-nationalist loyalty. This represented, at one level, a Muslim sense of disenchantment with the politics of 'brotherhood and unity' and shared multinational statehood, in light of the Serbian and Croatian behaviour. In the conditions of the 1990s the separatist tradition of the Young Muslims, suppressed after World War II, experienced a new dawn.



## THE BOSNIAN MUSLIMS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Dayton and Paris Accords of November–December 1995 that formally abolished the Bosnian republic and replaced it with a loose Bosnian union made up of a Muslim–Croat Federation of Bosnia–Hercegovina and a Serb Republic (*‘Republika Srpska’*) crowned the Bosnian nationalists’ rejection of the Communist and Partisan legacy. The success of this act of anti-Bosnian destruction must be attributed, first and foremost, to the overwhelming force with which the neighbouring Republic of Serbia assaulted Bosnia, involving use of the massively well-armed Yugoslav People’s Army; the smaller-scale but nevertheless highly destructive secondary assault on Bosnia carried out by a second neighbouring republic, Croatia; and the collusion of the international community in this aggression, through such means as the UN arms embargo on Bosnia and the various international plans for the country’s partition. Nevertheless, the fact that the Bosnian republic could be destroyed must also be attributed in part to the flaws in the original Bosnian Communist state-building project. For whereas the Bosnian Partisans, under Communist leadership, established a Bosnian nation-state under a political order that remained stable for over four decades, they did not establish a Bosnian nation. And without a Bosnian nation to underpin the nation-state, what was woven with such skill and care in the 1940s could be, and was, unravelled a half century later.

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### FOREWORD

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### INTRODUCTION: THE MUSLIM ROAD TO THE COMMUNIST TRIUMPH IN YUGOSLAVIA

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4. BOSNIAN ASSEMBLY AND YUGOSLAV FEDERATION: c. OCTOBER  
1943–APRIL 1944

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